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Mothers' helpers: The resources of female-headed families in a working class community

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MOTHERS' HELPERS: THE RESOURCES OF FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES IN A WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY

BY

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DISSERTATION

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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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For John

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Mothers' Helpers is the product of two years of sociological investigation into the lives of single mothers in northern New England. I developed an understanding of this issue by reading dozens of studies about changes in family structure, but mainly by interviewing 50 women and meeting their families, friends, and others who are part of their social world. I would like to thank all the people in the study community who must remain nameless but without whom I could not have conducted the research and completed this project.

The design and data collection stages of this study were funded by a cooperative agreement between Pennsylvania State University and the United States Department of Agriculture. I wrote the dissertation while supported by a research fellowship and a supplemental grant from The University of New Hampshire. Findings from this study will be summarized in a report, Strengthening Families, funded by the Northern New Hampshire Foundation, a division of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, which will be shared with parents and other community residents in the region.

It is my great pleasure to thank my mentor, Dr. Cynthia M. Duncan, for her warm friendship and thoughtful guidance from the day I began the doctoral program. I worked with Mil for five years as a research assistant studying poverty and social change in rural communities, and I developed my interests in families, class, and values while working on her larger study. She is an inspiring teacher and tireless adviser. She shared in my research "breakthroughs" and patiently responded to my frequent phone calls, visits, and e-mails during the past year while in the midst of writing her own book.

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ABSTRACT

MOTHERS' HELPERS: THE RESOURCES OF FEMALE-HEADED FAMILIES IN A WORKING CLASS COMMUNITY

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University of New Hampshire, December 1997

This study examines why women form single parent households and how they maintain them in a rural community. In 1995 and 1996 I conducted in-depth interviews with 50 divorced, separated, and never-married mothers, and 10 interviews with people working in community service programs. My findings show how one group of women benefited from early financial investments from their own steadily employed parents who owned their home and raised a large family. These "strong" families are headed by women who finished high school and had work experience before getting pregnant. Although many of them gave birth out of wedlock, they had the emotional and financial support of their families, friends, and partners. Other women grew up in families that had a difficult time making ends meet, either because parents had low-wage work or there was a single earner in the household. These women found it hard to finish school, often because they moved from place to place or they were burdened from pressures at home. When these women became pregnant, they were less prepared for parenthood and had few relatives in a position to help. Some of these "struggling" women married their children's fathers because it was the "only thing to do" while others turned to public assistance. A third group of "transitional" women had few family resources but have

been guided by teachers, church members, social workers, or others in the community who helped them connect with school, work, and parenting programs that made a real difference in their lives.

In sum, the majority of single mothers in this study are successfully raising their children when they have access to sufficient family and community resources. Women rely on their families for financial and emotional support, and they benefit from living close to their parents and siblings. In situations where women cannot turn to their own relatives, many are aided by education and training that improve work opportunities and increase self-confidence. Finally, affordable health care and reliable child care make combining work and family possible for all these women.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1994 the United States Department of Health and Human Services formed a working group of social scientists to study the recent trends in marriage, divorce, and fertility that have contributed to a dramatic rise in the proportion of children born and raised outside of marriage. What are the social, cultural, and economic changes that have made it possible -- even desirable -- for men and women to delay or forego marriage and have children out of wedlock? Concern about changes in the traditional nuclear family has grown as the number of single-parent families has increased. Certainly these changes have not occurred overnight; they have been unfolding for the past fifty years. Births to unmarried women, for example, have increased from 4 percent in 1940 to 31 percent in 1990. These changes are not confined to any one particular race or class; they have reached all families, whether they are living in urban, suburban, or rural settings.

What is happening to the family? How are these growing numbers of unmarried mothers managing as parents? How do their families and communities support them? While census data will tell us much about changes in family structure, income, work and education over time, we cannot learn about whether there are solid extended families, honest civic and church leaders, dedicated social workers, or decent child care centers without getting to know the people who live in the region. This study describes 50 working-class families' lives and examines the social and economic resources of single mothers in the rural communities they call home.

Family structure has changed markedly over the past generation all over the United States. Despite persistent stereotypes about "babies having babies", national data show that the typical single parent in America today is a white working-class woman in her twenties who graduated from high school and works outside the home. Family changes are affecting not just the urban poor and not just minorities. Two out of three nonmarital births are to women aged 20 or older, and most are occurring to women who have never before received welfare. And while some of these women marry their partners soon after the birth of the child, others are separated or divorced, and more than half of them have no plans for marriage at all (Ventura, Bachrach, and Kaye 1995: 21). Divorce has also risen steadily, with almost two-thirds of young marriages ending within a few years (Cherlin 1992). These two phenomena have together increased the proportion of women raising children outside of marriage.

Focusing on a rural community, this study examines why women form single parent households and how they maintain them. Although my project challenges many of the common assumptions about female-headed families, my purpose is not to understate the problems that are associated with divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing. As an interviewer who spent a great deal of time with single mothers and their children, I saw their hardships with my own eyes. Instead, I will attempt to demonstrate that there are many kinds of one-parent families and there is wide variation in how women cope with single motherhood. While these families face a high risk for poverty, some are more vulnerable than others.

Most of the divorced, separated, and never married mothers I interviewed are holding jobs to support their children, and many are furthering their education and skills in order to improve their employment prospects. These women are raising their children with the same values and expectations for their children's future as their middle-class married-couple neighbors. The typical single mother, however, must tap into "private" resources -- the assistance of her family, friends, and boyfriends -- in addition to relying on the "public" assistance of the government in order to manage her household.

This type of research is important because it deals with dramatic changes in families and household structure. Since the 1950s, the percentage of female-headed households has doubled from nine percent of all family-households to over 18 percent. Nationally, the number of female householders has increased at twice the rate of married couples and single male householders (see Table 1).

Table 1. Family-Households by Type, 1950-1994 (in thousands)

	Total	Married Couples	Male Householder	Female Householder
1994	68,490	53,171	2,913	12,406 (18%)
1990	66,090	52,317	2,884	10,890 (16%)
1980	58,426	48,180	1,706	8,540 (14%)
1970	51,456	44,728	1,228	5,500 (11%)
1960	44,905	39,254	1,228	4,422 (10%)
1950	38,838	34,075	1,169	3,594 (9%)

Source: Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P20-483, table A-2

This demographic shift has broad implications for how adults organize their work schedules and maintain family relationships; it also affects how children are housed, cared for, and supported.

Research that focuses on female-headed families is also timely because just as the numbers and proportion of these families have increased, it has become even harder for them to maintain a reasonable standard of living (see Table 2). Poverty rates among young families with children headed by high school graduates not going on to college have soared since 1973, and they have remained very high for women who have dropped out of school as well.

Table 2. Percentage of Female-Headed Families in Poverty, by Education, for 1973 and 1990

	1973	1990
Female high school graduate heading a family with one or more children	47%	62%
Female high school dropout heading a family with one or more children	76%	85%

Source: Children's Defense Fund 1991

Why are female-headed families having such a hard time today? Explanations range from declining wages to the decreased value of welfare benefits. Over the past generation, structural changes in the national economy have altered the opportunity structure for families and households. In many rural areas full-time high-paying manufacturing jobs have declined while part-time low-paying service producing jobs have increased. As a result, both men and women work longer hours at jobs that pay lower wages and provide fewer benefits. In 1992 the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress reported, families with children are on a "treadmill." Economic

restructuring means that workers have a harder time supporting their families, and that single parent families are particularly stressed.

Most women receiving welfare are also working (Edin 1993; Edin and Lein 1997). When the majority of single mothers are working outside the home on a full-time or part-time basis, the availability and adequacy of child care is another concern for parents. Like married couples, most single mothers find someone to take care of their children in their own home while they are at work. However, this person is more likely to be a relative or close friend than a hired baby-sitter (Spalter-Roth, Burr, Hartmann, and Shaw 1995). Increasingly, single mothers who work during the day are using community-based child care centers where they drop-off and pick-up their children. Reliable transportation is another problem for single mothers who live far from the town where they work, attend school, or buy groceries and do the laundry.

Research on the potential effects of family structure on children's well-being suggests children experience disadvantages from stressful family events, such as changes in residence, parental disruption, the combination of financial hardship and lack of supervision, not simply from the fact of having an unmarried parent (Haveman and Wolfe 1994; Skolnick 1997). Several studies report that half of all children born to single women grow up poor, and as a result, they are more likely to attend lower quality schools, to acquire fewer literacy and mathematical skills, and to obtain unstable jobs with low incomes as adults (Mare and Winship 1991; McLanahan and Garfinkel 1989). We worry about these changes because we associate single motherhood with poverty, but as many studies have already pointed out, the majority of women who are poor single parents were

poor before they became pregnant (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Bane and Ellwood 1994). Moreover, researchers suggest that children of divorced parents have more in common with children whose mothers have never married than with children whose parents have stayed married (Ventura, Bachrach, and Kaye 1995). If only because of their likely economic hardship, we should be concerned about why the numbers of mother-only households are increasing, and how both the parents and children are coping in these households.

Conventional norms tell us that marriage should precede childbearing. The most socially acceptable solution to nonmarital pregnancy for white women a generation ago was either a quick marriage or a quiet adoption (see Solinger 1992). But just as economic conditions have changed, norms about the right circumstances for forming families have also changed. More people are waiting until they are in their late twenties and thirties to marry and some are not marrying at all. Cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage are commonplace, creating more complicated configurations of extended families and reconstituted families (Cherlin 1992). Although longitudinal studies suggest that children growing up with two parents "do better" than children who grow up with one parent, most children who grow up in single mother households finish school, postpone childbearing, and avoid poverty themselves (see McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Raising children successfully as a single parent means gathering together the resources that people assume went along only with marriage -- steady loving relationships, readiness for parenthood, financial independence, adequate supervision for children, and high expectations for their success and happiness.

Some mother-only families will be able to support themselves, balance their roles and responsibilities, and raise their children more successfully than others. A central question guiding this study is, under what circumstances can single-parent families be strong and secure? Knowing why women choose to (or end up) separating motherhood from marriage will give us a better understanding of how women in female-headed households manage their family and economic responsibilities in the 1990s. There is growing recognition among those who study families that paying attention to social context brings a fuller understanding of the subtle "choices" and decisions that can either widen or narrow opportunities for young families, both adults and children (Bokemeier 1997; Brewster, Billy, and Grady 1993; Jencks and Peterson 1991; Van Haitsma 1989).

Northern New England offers an ideal setting for exploring the social context of women's decision-making and coping strategies because of its low migration rate -- most families have lived in the area for generations and have long-standing personal ties to one another -- and its remoteness from large cities. Its working-class communities are small and cohesive and its social institutions are contained within city boundaries. To distinguish the vulnerabilities from the strengths of female-headed households, I asked 50 women about their family background, how they prepared for motherhood, and how they figured out a strategy to support their households as single parents. I also inquired about the extent to which they have contact with their child's father, and if their family, friends, and other networks provided assistance. Finally, I learned about community norms and values surrounding divorce and nonmarital childbearing by observing how these women are treated by others in the community.

To identify participants for this project, I approached directors of child care centers and family health services in the community that reach out to poor and working single mothers with children under five years old. These included a federally-funded Head Start center serving low-income women and their children, a community college pre-school serving the children of low-income and working-class women enrolled in school, and a privately-funded children's learning center serving working- and middle-class women and their families. Through a family health clinic, I also contacted mothers who were not relying on centers to care for their children. By meeting these women and learning about their lives, I was able to create separate analytical categories for those women who grew up with few opportunities, those who always had enough when they were children, and those who were always somewhere "in-between" poor and working class. The following chapters tell the stories of how these 50 women became single mothers in northern New England, how they are doing now, and what they think about their situation. What opportunities and constraints do single mothers face? Under what circumstances do they experience change and mobility?

The next chapter reviews past studies of working class families from the 1950s through the present. The marriages, jobs, and kin relationships of the white working-class are described and compared to middle-class models or contrasted with the values of the underclass. While they sometimes are portrayed as hard-working Americans, they are also described as racist, sexist, and materialistic. Their marriages have been labelled authoritarian and patriarchal. But I argue that many of the past assumptions about working-class family structure are no longer relevant. We are not talking about the same

families in the 1990s as in the 1950s. Today the men and women who were born into working-class families are not in a hurry to flee their parents' home and head straight for marriage. They are likely to have some college education, to have lived on their own and to have traveled a bit. What has changed in these families? What makes it possible for them to be independent? I examine their material and non-material resources to assess how contemporary women from working-class families manage their lives.

In the third chapter, I describe the selection of the women and families in my sample and explain the methods I used to answer the research questions, including procedures for data collection and analysis. The fourth chapter "Who are mother-headed families in the 1990s?" presents the overall patterns in the 50 single mother interviewees' background circumstances and current experiences. I offer a brief description of how these women compare to their counterparts a generation or two ago. I also point out the major similarities and differences within my sample. In the fifth chapter I use a framework that traces the quality and quantity of resources in their families during childhood, adolescence and the transition to adulthood. To do this I introduce a representative from each of three groups -- 20 strong, 15 struggling, and 15 transitional mother-headed families in my sample. The case studies reflect the three conceptual groupings, and for each, I detail the financial standing of their parents, their own education and work histories, their relationships and social networks.

The sixth chapter demonstrates the variation within a sub-sample of 35 women. By contrasting the strengths of the strong group, and the vulnerabilities of the struggling group, I show how resource withholdings and investments at important life junctures

affect how women see their options for motherhood, marriage and work. Those who have had many people and places to turn to over the course of their lives are now under the least stress as single parents; the others are having a harder time. The seventh chapter discusses the 15 "transitional" women and their families. Some would have given up on this group, but my study shows how community institutions, outreach programs, mentors and role models have made a difference for women who have struggled in the past. In addition to resources inside the family, people and programs outside the family provide essential resources for some working-class women to help them cope as parents and workers. I outline three initiatives -- adult education, job training, and entrpreneurial programs -- that are important for changes the lives of women I interviewed. Readiness and timing matters for reaching these single mothers. Finally, in the last chapter, I discuss the research and policy implications of the findings.

CHAPTER II

RESOURCES IN WORKING-CLASS FAMILIES

In a rural manufacturing town in northern New England on a winter evening, young women keep busy with their weekday routine. They rush home from work to relieve the afternoon baby-sitter and fix a quick dinner before the Thursday night TV shows begin. After getting the children into bed, they call Mom, and finally settle into a comfortable chair to finish homework for their evening course at the local community college. Who are these families living in the tenement buildings in the East side and in the duplex houses on the West side? How are these women and the men they know similar and different from their working parents a generation ago? What are their lives like today?

This chapter reviews common approaches to studying white working-class families since the post World War II period. The sociological literature describing the working class as family-centered has implications both for women's roles and for their support network and social circle. Scholars have focused on three characteristics that they believe are unique to working-class families. From Komarovsky's Blue-Collar Marriage (1962) to Rubin's Families on the Fault Line (1994) the research literature points to distinctive patterns of working-class family life in different regions of the United States. The first is that husbands are primarily responsible for wage-earning outside the home and wives are primarily responsible for children and housekeeping inside the home. Gender roles are highly segregated in their homes as well as in their

social activities (Bott 1957; Rainwater 1959; Gans 1967). The second is that working-class children are strictly supervised; they are raised to be obedient and submissive to adults who hold positions of authority including parents, clergy, teachers, and police officers. These childrearing practices are meant to keep teenagers out of trouble but some have argued they also create a class of workers who lack creativity and initiative (Kohn 1969). The third is that the working-class family is patriarchal in its organization. The father is responsible for disciplining the children ("just wait until your father gets home" mother would say) and because of his role as primary breadwinner, he makes all of the important decisions affecting the family (Gans 1962, 1967; Rubin 1976). Most of these findings about working-class families, however, are based on ethnographic studies conducted by sociologists in the 1950s and 1960s. They may be outdated, and to the extent that they are accurate, they describe life that characterizes only married couples with children, not newer configurations of mother-only families, step-families and extended families.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s researchers recognized the gap in the existing literature in the sociology of the family. Most of the work focused on middle class patterns or on the multifaceted problems of poor families. A small group of researchers began to examine the contributions of wives to paid work, and the leisure pursuits of white working-class couples. But little attention has been paid to working-class single women outside of their connections to men through marriage (for studies of working-class men, see especially Sennett and Cobb 1972 and Halle 1984). There is almost no work looking at women growing up in working-class families who now head households

of their own. In the following pages, I discuss empirical studies of the working class that have contributed to our knowledge base over time, and then I present more recent work that focuses on the contemporary issue of single motherhood among the working class. Drawing on this literature, I suggest a theory of resources to examine the relationship between social class and family arrangements.

Working-Class Families Since World War II

The working class is often described as the largest social class in American society, bridging the gap between lower- and upper-class families (Grusky 1994; Gilbert and Kahl 1993; Giddens 1987). Some have described them as those who are "trying" but still not making it (MacLeod 1987). Others have distinguished between blue and pink collar colors that match the real or imaginary uniforms of their occupations (Rosen 1987). In the 1960s and 1970s much scholarly attention turned to the white working class -- they were described as "working" Americans who lived in cities and suburbs. Their marriages and families were sometimes treated as following the same patterns as the middle class (Komarovsky 1962; Gans 1967). Other times, they were regarded as having a lifestyle all their own (Rubin 1974).

Rainwater et al.'s Workingman's Wife was among the first to focus attention on the growing numbers of working-class families moving to the suburbs in the post World War II period. The purpose of their study was to describe the preferences and spending habits of working-class families, which were expected to be different from those of the middle-class: "Here is a vast group of consumers who have their own special dreams and desires, their own value systems, their own way of reacting to products, to advertising, or

to sales messages" (1959: 16). Since wives were the homemakers "who keep the household and family going while the husband earns their keep" the research focused on the motivations and habits of working-class women (1959: 25). Their husbands worked in a range of occupations, for example, truck drivers, carpenters, brick layers, and steelworkers. Some of the wives worked outside the home, but they were more likely to identify as "wife and mother, not as worker" (1959: 25).

The women interviewed in Workingman's Wife were young married mothers. A typical day in their life consisted of cooking, cleaning, washing, folding, and ironing and other "dull" tasks. Small children needed to be fed and meals had to be prepared in the afternoon and on the table for husbands by five o'clock. They reported that every day was "exactly the same." Because many of their husbands worked Saturdays and in the evenings they rarely had time to relax as a family. But they believed that their life is "just like every other wife's" perhaps because the neighborhood was homogeneous. Sunday was the only change in routine, when many had dinner and visited with their relatives.

The working-class women in Rainwater et al.'s study call themselves "family type people" -- they married young and established their own households near their families. They spent a great deal of time at home with their children while their husbands were away at work. Because most of the women's time was invested in keeping the family functioning, their worst fears were losing her husband, and her access to wages from his employment:

> In the life of the working-class wife, the ties that matter can be disrupted for little reasons and for big. Disruption can be final because of death or desertion -- or repetitive because of recurrent jealousy or friction... Her central concerns are close to the most basic human events: birth, illness, accomplishing the tasks and chores of daily life (1959: 57).

Rainwater describes women who were heavily invested in group life and fearful of being abandoned or left alone through a tragedy.

Women also depended on their relatives for financial help in the early years of their marriage. One woman described how her parents helped her and her under-employed husband pay for their children's medical expenses: "We've had so much sickness and doctor bills to pay this last year that we wouldn't have had much Christmas or Thanksgiving if my mother hadn't sent us a little extra money. That was how we did get to do a few things that otherwise we couldn't afford" (1959: 157). Husbands in Rainwater et al.'s study did not want to acknowledge outside help from relatives, and preferred that their wives care for children at home rather than contribute to their income even when it meant deferring dreams of buying a new car or a home. These wives were particularly skilled at saving small amounts of money in "tin cans" and waiting for department store sales before making clothing and furniture purchases. In the 1950s, television became a way for working-class wives to see a different world through the soap operas and sitcoms on the small screen. Working-class women were said to care deeply about what other people thought of them and they wanted to create an attractive home for the enjoyment of their husbands. More than visiting neighbors or playing cards, TV watching at home was the most common way that husbands and wives spent time together in the evening (Rainwater et al., 1959: 193).

Komarovsky's Blue-Collar Marriage (1962) went beyond describing patterns in consumption to examine family relationships. She interviewed married couples under age 40 with at least one child. All of the workers in these families held working-class

jobs as semi-skilled or unskilled laborers. None were college-educated. About one-third of the marriages were reported to be "happy" unions, the rest were somewhat troubled or unhappy. Komarovsky found that these couples did not experience a great deal of emotional conflict between work and family life. Men worked as a duty to support the household and their wives were uninvolved and uninformed about what their husband did on the job: "The workingman's wife does not resent her husband's career, but neither does she feel that she contributes to it by social entertaining or advice" (1962: 331).

About one-fifth of the women in her sample were in the labor force at the time. Among the women who worked, she found two "types" -- women who *had* to work and women who *wanted* to work. Of the overworked working mother she said: "She gets very little help with housework from her husband and her life is grim and exhausting" (1962: 65). Mothers who worked voluntarily, however, considered their part-time job a refreshing break from the home, a new kind of responsibility that brought them personal satisfaction: "When I get to the factory I work alone in the room and it's restful. It's the only time I get a chance to think straight. Then during the breaks and at lunch I talk to the girls and I like that too" (1962: 67).

Komarovsky also found that shift work was common among those couples in which both spouses held jobs. Describing one situation in which the husband was employed as a cook in the daytime and the wife worked as a cashier in the evening, she reported that they viewed the arrangement as temporary although it had already lasted more than a year (1962: 67). They preferred to pretend that he was the main breadwinner and she was helping out. Although couples needed the money, many of the men

considered "letting" their wives work risky, as this man put it, "A woman will work with a fellow and before you know it, she'll be seeing him day in and day out. He might say, 'Let's go and have a drink together' and that's how things start. A couple of dollars extra ain't worth it. Before you know it the woman will be running out on him. I don't say that every working girl does it, but it happens" (1962: 72). The couples who could manage in the face of hard economic times were those who reported strong emotional ties, easy communication, compatible temperaments, and a high level of trust in each other.

Many working-class couples lived near their families and women reported maintaining close, meaningful relationships with their mothers (Bott 1959). Among the less-educated group, however, she found that many husbands and wives felt hostile towards their parents, perhaps because they lived in close proximity to them. Although social norms of the time period emphasized that newlyweds should establish an independent household, forty percent of Komarovsky's couples lived with relatives when they were first married and more than one-half doubled-up with parents or extended families at some time during their marriage. Ninety-three percent lived within driving distance from their parents at the time they were interviewed (1962: 241-242). While some parents were able to give loans to adult children in emergencies, most of the working-class couples did not expect to receive help with the purchase of a first home or substantial inheritances from their aging parents.

Gans' Urban Villagers (1962) describes a distinctive working-class ethnic subculture among close-knit multigenerational families. He concluded that the extended family took precedence above all else: "It's way of life based on social relationships

amidst relatives. The working-class views the world from the family circle and considers everything else outside it as either a means to its maintenance or its destruction" (1962: 256). At family gatherings, wives socialized with other women relatives over coffee in the kitchen while husbands drank beer with other men in the living room. Couples were affectionate with each other, but they do not describe their spouses as their best friends. Older relatives were helpful. Aunts and uncles would stand in to take care of children when parents were sick or unable to do so. Relatives and neighbors would call on one another frequently to check up and make sure everything was all right.

These families approached both work pressures and opportunities with detachment, and made decisions based on how they would affect the whole (extended) family, not on the basis of costs or benefits for any one individual person. Again, commitment to work and education were not as important to the working class as their commitment to family: "Even when work is well paid and satisfying, the West Ender will try to minimize any involvement in it beyond that required of him. Work is a means to an end, never an end in itself. At best, single-minded dedication to work is thought to be strange, and at worst, likely to produce ulcers, heart trouble, and the possibility of an early death" (1962: 124). While working-class parents wanted their children to grow up and experience an easier life than themselves, they were not expecting to be able to take expensive vacations or retire early. Like the families in Rainwater et al. and Komarovsky's studies, the West-Ender families watched television for entertainment and ate at home most of the time. Their dreams for the future were realistic; as long as they

had enough money to pay the bills, feed and clothe the children, and go to the movies on Saturday night, they had enough.

The 1970s brought a new wave of research on the white working class that focused less on their family life and more on their work lives. Sexton and Sexton's Blue Collars and Hard Hats (1971) sought to rectify some of the assumptions about working-class culture by describing how men perceive their social position. Working-class men, they argue, are stereotyped and parodied, but not often understood. Because many workers in plants and factories are removed from contact with the outside world for eight or more hours each day, they do not have the contact that management has with the public or the connections even their working-class wives meet when they hold jobs in the service-sector, where they see clients and customers on a regular basis. These men sometimes feel cut-off from larger society, and thus, the family becomes the last safe refuge.

Similarly, Sennett and Cobb's Hidden Injuries of Class (1972) focuses on the uncertainties felt by working men as they try to "make something of themselves." Most of the men interviewed by these researchers held positions as laborers. They describe how their feel wounded and devalued by their place in society. Yet the men pride themselves on the sacrifices they make for their children and wives, working overtime at dead-end assembly-line jobs to keep their women at home or to send their sons to college. Although they hope that the next generation will achieve more than themselves, they feel uneasy with the changes they see in their educated sons and working daughters. The men

defer to bosses in order to make money and keep their jobs; they demand subordination from their family at home.

Rubin's Worlds of Pain (1976) updates the findings from earlier studies of married "blue-collar" marriages by focusing on the children who grew up during the 1950s and 60s and were forming families of their own in the 1970s. These were young marriages that were full of hope and high expectations. Many were doing better than their parents and they were pleased about being able to purchase a home. Although this generation of working-class husbands and wives were living in more prosperous times, their personal income was below the median for a family of four, and they were heavy consumers. They reported high credit card debt that made them nervous about their economic futures (1976: 204).

There have been a number of studies of marital relationships and family dynamics of working-class households over the past fifty years. Most studies argue that working-class marriages reflect traditional gender roles, especially among couples with less educated husbands. Rubin's 1970s families fit this pattern, as shown in this quote from a wife who was disappointed by her husband "unmanliness":

> I couldn't understand how he couldn't get a job. I knew I could get a job any time I really wanted one, but I had to stay home with the baby. It seemed like he was just dumb or something that he couldn't find a good steady job. And you know, no woman likes to think she's smarter than her husband. But I've got to admit, I did, and he didn't like it one bit. Neither did I (1976: 91).

The husband is the breadwinner; the wife (who, if she works, prefers to be home) does most of the housework and the child care. The father acts as the ultimate authority and

disciplinarian, and the mother is the nurturer. Fathers pass along traditionally masculine behaviors to their sons, and mothers teach their daughters how to charm a man. Husbands socialize with other male friends at the local pub or bar, while women pass the time by talking with girlfriends and family.

Marriage has been a way for young adults to find independence and leave the parents' home. But marriage for working-class women often includes a romanticized fantasy of love and attaining the American Dream which neither their own home nor their own marriage lives up to. When they dreamed about marrying, they envisioned an early period of struggle, and then a big pay-off -- owning and furnishing a large, new single-family house. Within a few years of marriage, many of the women Rubin interviewed gave up on achieving that measure of success:

> As you can see, that dream I had about getting married and having a storybook life didn't exactly work out... Life sure doesn't match the dreams, does it? Here I am living in this old, dumpy house and the furniture is a grubby mess. I still have those pictures of the storybook life in my head, but I have a lot more sense now than when I was young. Now I know we're lucky just to be able to keep up wit the bills. (1976: 72).

Social changes affecting all families generated unique strains for working-class families in the 1970s. The percentage of wives working increased from about 20 percent in 1960 to almost 50 percent in 1980. Most were working in service occupations -- cleaning houses, waiting on tables, working in grocery or department stores -- jobs that perhaps did not pay well but did contribute to their family income and increased independence (Seifer 1976; Rosen 1987; Lamphere 1993). More working-class women entered two- and four-year colleges which prepared them for decent, if traditional, careers in nursing and teaching fields. These broadened "middle-class" experiences led to greater

acceptance of feminist ideas that had been discussed in women's magazines for a decade. Some working-class women became disenchanted with husbands who were opposed to change and unwilling to accept that their wives wanted greater control over their lives in marriage. The divorce rate increased for all populations at this time (Reskin and Padavic 1994).

Although the previous studies would lead us to believe that working-class wives were subordinate and family-centered, Seifer's Nobody Speaks For Me (1974) describes women taking care of children their neighborhoods, helping other women, and getting involved in politics in addition to fulfilling roles as wives and mothers. They were torn between their desire to work and to be "good" mothers. One women reflected on her decision to stay at home after having children: "There was no day care then, and I wasn't going to leave my kids with anybody. My mother was always at the pastry shop, so there I was. I had this big house and we needed financial help and I really do like children. So, rather than go out to work, I decided to do some foster care work. We came to this house when Carmella was close to six and Ralphie was almost two, and we got three foster kids less than a year after we moved in, in 1954" (1976: 59-60). Other women went to work when their husbands were laid off. This woman described how hard it was for her husband and young child when she went to work: "I felt bad at the time having to work. I just loved my baby dearly and I just felt kind of left out that I couldn't be with him all the time. He was the most important thing in my whole life" (1976: 403).

In the 1970s many more working-class women with school aged children worked outside the home for longer periods of time. These women were not in the labor force

temporarily, they were major contributors to the household income. While men were working as craftsmen or skilled workers in the steel and auto industries, or as miners and loggers in resource-dependent places, women performed semi-skilled or unskilled work in textile complexes and shoe factories. Women earned low wages in a segregated work environment, but they were slowly gaining economic independence (Rosen 1987: 19).

Friends, sisters, and mothers continued to be an important part of working-class wives' daily lives whether they worked outside or inside the home. These networks worked especially well when the women lived nearby their relatives and old friends. Bott (1959), Komarovsky (1962) and Rubin (1976) all found that women had a number of confidants to provide empathy, support, and understanding. Husbands were sometimes distrustful of such close friendships because they were unsure how much information about themselves and their marriages were being made public. These ties were not just emotional, for many they were instrumental. Many working-class women who held jobs preferred to rely on their mothers and sisters to care for their children than to use child care centers. As one working mother in Rubin's study put it,

> I don't want my kids brought up by strangers. This way it's just right. My mother-in-law comes here and stays with them and it's family. We don't have to worry about what kind of stuff some stranger is teaching them. We know they're learning right from wrong. I'd be afraid to leave them in a school or someplace like that. I'd worry that they might get too far away from the family (1976: 87).

As Gans reported a generation before, working-class families' social life centered primarily around the family, and sometimes includes activities in the neighborhood or at school. These men and women remain less likely to move away from families relations than their middle class counterparts. While Gans (1962) found that socializing with

neighbors was relatively unimportant, Rubin's studies (1976, 1994) contradict this information. Visits among neighbors who are "like themselves" were common in the evenings and on weekends. But working-class families were not as involved in religious and community organizations as middle-class groups. They did not interact as freely with members of other social classes at parent and teacher conferences, town meetings, and other public forums. They tended to be more reluctant to get to know people and make friends outside the immediate neighborhood and extended family (Bott 1959; Rubin 1976, 1994). Many studies have examined the social activities of working-class men and women and found that it included drinking, bowling, hunting, and fishing for men. Making crafts, sewing, and visiting with family were popular among women. Watching television was the most common family activity and reading for pleasure was rare (Rainwater et al. 1959; Gans 1962; Rubin 1976). While it may be important to consider the variety of ways in which working-class families differ from middle-class families, David Halle (1984) points out that as the nature of work changes, class distinctions are becoming harder to make. Although the men he studied were "blue-collar" workers at a chemical plant, he found that they made "white-collar" wages and enjoyed a lifestyle that was similar in many ways to their middle class neighbors. He also found that leisure activities were more sharply divided by gender than by class. Sporting events and bars attracted men from all social classes, for example, and leisure pursuits were largely determined by the flexibility of the household budget. Family income that falls in the upper range can increasingly be generated by one middle-class salary or by joining the

husbands' and wives' more modest wages together. As Halle suggests, there may be more fluidity in the class structure outside the workplace (1984: 335).

The findings of sociological studies of working-class family life up to the 1980s concur that men and women took on the responsibilities of marriage to achieve a measure of independence from their own parents. They had children soon afterwards and became saddled with mortgages and credit card payments which kept husbands locked into unsatisfying jobs. Although some wives worked outside, most felt isolated in their small homes, and they spent their free time visiting their families on weekends and seeing neighbors during the week. If the marriage was unsuccessful most stayed together for the benefit of their children.

But these studies -- and the ideas they have generated about working-class families -- are outdated. Recent research on "The Family" has reacted against functionalist theories of family dynamics that idealized the modern nuclear family, and created a nuclear middle class model with which working-class families were compared (Gerstel and Gross 1987; Thorne and Yalom 1992). In the 1950s Talcott Parsons defined the family as a social group with a common residence involved in economic cooperation and reproduction. His traditional notion of family was that of a man and a woman in a legally approved sexual relationship with one or more children. Although child care and house work were sometimes performed by hired help, the family unit was primarily responsible for socializing children and the making the house a home. The residential, economic and emotional "isolation" of the modern family was what made it distinctive and even "advantageous." The mutual obligations of an at-work husband and an at-home

wife took precedence over old-fashioned connections to extended families. The nuclear family model suggested an emotionally and economically closed unit that neither lived with, nor pooled, its money with the husband's or wife's family of origin. Instead,

> the members of the nuclear family, consisting of parents and their dependent children, ordinarily occupy a separate dwelling not shared with members of the family of orientation of either spouse and this household is in the typical case economically independent, subsisting in the first instance from the occupational earnings of the husband-father (Parsons and Bales 1955: 10).

In addition to the economies of scale created by sharing a household, Gary Becker argued that there were also individual economic gains associated with the exchange between a woman who works in the home and a man who works for wages in the paid labor market within the institution of marriage. The "goods" that were being traded were income and "household production" which included raising and nurturing children and doing the daily chores and housework. Women were thought to be the "natural" homemakers, or at least it was more efficient for them to stay at home because women earn lower wages than men (Cherlin 1992: 99).

Becker's theory makes sense if women's wages in the paid labor market are lower than men's, a situation many working families found in the 1950s. When productivity stopped increasing in 1973, earnings stagnated, causing fundamental changes in the opportunity structure for younger workers (Levy and Michel 1991). Working-class wives re-entered the labor force to help support the family through paid work. Despite wage disparities between men and women, labor force participation of married women with children has tripled since 1960. By 1990, 58 percent of all women were in the paid labor force, compared with 76 percent of men.

Much attention has been devoted to changes in women's participation in the work force. Among married couple families with children in 1990, the proportion in which both the husband and wife worked was 70 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990). As Masnick and Bane (1980) point out, however, it is not merely labor force participation that affects how families organize their lives, but the level of attachment women have to their careers matters as well as the amount of money they contribute to the household income. A generation ago, women worked outside the home but their jobs were more likely to be part-time, temporary, and poorly paid. When their husbands were making good money, however, most wives stayed home. Is strengthening men's attachment to the labor force the best way to promote secure families? This reasoning relegates mothers to the "reserve labor force" rather than women who need regular full-time work (Feree 1987; Smith 1987). The limited, precarious resources of mother-breadwinners makes it even more difficult for women to support their children when their cannot secure work. Work and family are often competing responsibilities. As Reskin and Padavic state:

> Jobs and families both demand enormous commitments of time and energy, especially during the peak years of family formation and career growth. Jobs usually consume about a third of a person's day, not including time spent commuting and preparing for work. In addition, many working women are responsible for caring for four groups: themselves, their husbands, their children, and their elderly parents or in-laws (1994: 147).

Both money and time are important for raising a family. Married women continue to work after having children, and they need husbands, sons, and daughters to do their share of housework. While employment trends have changed, 75 percent of women employed full-time continue to do more of the housework (Hochschild 1989; Reskin and Padavic

1994). But in married couple families, at least there are two adults to share family responsibilities. What happens when households are headed by just one parent? By mothers not fathers? Where do these women turn for help with housework, with money, and with time?

Work and family life has become more complex as more men and women postpone marriage while they attend college, establish careers, and attempt to achieve financial independence. Now, men and women spend more of their early adult life unmarried, making it possible to "try out" a larger number of sexual and romantic relationships. More than 50 percent of Americans agree that nonmarital sex is acceptable, and that it is a good idea to live together before marriage (Cherlin 1992; South and Tolnay 1992). Cohabitation usually lasts a short time, however, with the arrangement ending either in marriage or in a break up after a couple of years. Although there are fewer cultural pressures and economic incentives for marriage, most people continue to express a personal preference for marriage, and the vast majority (90 percent) of men and women will marry at some point in their lives. About half of these marriages will end in divorce (Bumpass 1990, South and Tolnay 1992). How are family choices and circumstances different for the current generation of working-class young adults? What do these changes mean for the rest of society? The next section reviews the growing body of research on women who head their own households as single mothers, and are raising children outside of marriage.

Family Structure and Family Resources

Current discussions of single motherhood center on the circumstances of never married mothers who were poor before they became pregnant (Edin and Lein 1997; Polokow 1993; Schein 1995; Stack 1974) or on the predicament of divorced mothers who when they were married were part of the middle class (Arendell 1986; Newman 1988; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). But a growing segment of single mothers are divorced, separated, and never married white women in their twenties, most of whom come from working-class backgrounds (Burton 1995; Hertz and Ferguson 1997; Ooms 1995). We have little knowledge of their family background, schooling experiences, relationships with friends and boyfriends, as well as their work strategies and social networks. What are their own households like? What family resources are in place? What can they offer their children?

Two generations ago it was so difficult for working-class families to support one household, few considered the possibility of maintaining two separate households. But recent cultural and economic changes have made it somewhat easier to reconfigure households. Now, instead of depending on husbands as their only socially acceptable source of support, women facing difficult circumstances may turn to parents, other relatives and neighbors. Kinship ties extend across the boundaries of family and household (Hertz and Ferguson 1997; Stacey 1990; Stack 1974; Stack and Burton 1994; Thorne and Yalom 1992). Like the poor, working-class families develop strategies to survive based on the resources and relationships available to them:

> They immerse themselves in a domestic circle of kinfolk who will help them. To maintain a stable number of people who share reciprocal obligations, at appropriate stages in the life cycle people establish socially

> recognized kin ties... Friends may be incorporated into one's domestic circle: if they satisfy one another's expectations, they may be called kin -- cousins, sisters, brothers, daddies (Stack 1974: 29).

The single women in Stack's (1974) study of The Flats, a poor urban black community, reported that their relationships with men "robbed them of their dignity and self-respect" (Morrissey 1987: 305). Like working-class whites, when they found themselves pregnant, they left their casual relationships and chose to head their own families rather than marry the father of their children. However, using the word "choice" may be misleading because what women choose under conditions of economic hardship should not be confused with what they might do if more options were available to them: "women may claim to prefer to head a family when economic supports from kin and friends outweigh those available from a boyfriend, but they might prefer another family form under different conditions" (Morrissey 1987: 311). Stack's women, for example, wanted to marry but felt discouraged both by economic realities and opposition from their own kin. These men were not steadily employed and brought little to the relationship. In a review of changes in norms, values and attitudes about marriage and family life, Thornton (1995) concludes that the great majority of women still want to marry and bear children, but they want their marriages to be characterized by "love, stability, and durability." When this relationship is not considered possible, women are increasingly willing to raise children in households without husbands.

In a more recent ethnography, Stacey (1990) explores "postmodern" family arrangements by observing two kin networks of people from the Silicon Valley. In contrast to the stereotype of working-class white women as conservative traditionalists,

she argues that they have responded to economic pressures and domestic upheavals by reconfiguring their lives in ways that made sense for them: "Struggling creatively, often heroically, to sustain oppressed families and to escape the most oppressive ones, they drew on 'traditional' premodern kinship resources and crafted untraditional ones, lurching back and forward" (1990: 252). Although the families in Stacey's Brave New Families are too diverse a group to fit into a particular social class, her study actually highlights the usefulness of conceptualizing social class, as Rapp does, as a process in which "categories of people get swept up at different times and places and deposited into different relations to the means of production and to one another" (1992: 171). Many families use a multiple-earner strategy to support their households and rely on a combination of family and outside institutions to help raise their children. As divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing become more common among middle- as well as lower-income families, we may see more adaptive strategies occur in all social classes. The ability to provide financial security is central to all families, and in single-parent families with adequate resources, this goal may be accomplished by pooling income and sharing assets.

Sociologists who study family structure suggest that there are three major types of disadvantages that children experience when they are raised in a single parent household (Bane and Ellwood 1994; Cherlin 1992; Hoffman and Duncan 1988; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989). These can be summarized as problems that stem from having less money and less attention than they would if they were raised in

a two-parent household, and fewer neighborhood and community ties (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

While the working-class families described earlier had financial worries and spells of unemployment, with both parents in the household there was almost always the possibility of two earners for the household. If the breadwinner-husband became ill or disabled, the homemaker-mother could temporarily or permanently enter the labor force and the family could rely on her paid employment to help support them. According to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the median family income of married-couple families with at least one teenage child was $61,135 per year in 1992. Even parents who did not finish high school themselves had a median family income of $43,693 (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 81). These financial resources from earnings make a difference in children's lives in predictable ways. Money buys more than food and clothing, it supports a household in which children have the things they need to succeed at school. Married parents with a financial "cushion" can afford to send children to summer camp, to after-school enrichment programs, to sports and music programs. They also set up expectations that they will be able to assist a child who wants to go to college (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994: 94). Their children do not have to work to contribute to the family, they have the freedom from worry and responsibility so that they can "be kids."

When a mother is heading a family alone, she is unlikely to be able to earn enough to maintain even a "working-class" lifestyle on her salary alone. The median family income for a single parent with a college degree was $37,745 in 1992 (McLanahan and

Sandefur 1994: 81), but child care expenses would severely diminish the amount of money she takes home to her family each week. In her study of marginalized mothers Polokow (1993: 165) reasoned:

> Viable employment as a means of establishing economic autonomy for single mothers is vital. Yet an ongoing child care crisis is created when women-as-worker is not also recognized as woman-as-mother.

Of course, if a woman has no formal skills or training, she is not likely to be able to earn above the minimum wage for her family. It is almost impossible to make ends meet on one low wage job. Some studies, however, have found that non-traditional male-dominated jobs offer better pay and higher job satisfaction for women who can take advantage of them (Gerstel and Gross 1987). As one observer noted:

> A shortage of workers is projected in some skilled jobs, particularly newly developing semiskilled and skilled occupations. Traditional blue-collar trades, such as construction and machining, continue to provide job opportunities for women and men" (Schein 1995: 128).

Raising children means providing supervision, discipline, and guidance throughout the childhood and adolescent years. Working-class parents have been criticized for being too strict with their children, and single parents are often chastised for being too permissive. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that children growing up in a mother-only household have little contact with their fathers. They also have more conflict in their interaction with their mothers (Cherlin 1992; Furstenburg and Hughes 1995). Single mothers reported few rules in their household, and fewer shared activities like a family breakfasts or dinners compared to married parents. Working mothers may have a difficult time setting and enforcing curfews because they are not always at home when their children are home. Divorced and never married mothers were more likely to

leave children at home unsupervised than were married parents. Some mothers, however, reported that grandmothers were helpful for watching out for children when their mother is not home.

Family structure does not tell the entire story. One of the most important factors that previous research has identified as contributing to children's well-being is the education level of the mother. Mother's level of schooling can serve as a proxy for some household investments that contribute to a child's adjustment, motivation, and school performance (Haveman and Wolfe 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Better educated mothers may be able to convey to their children the value of learning; these mothers also may monitor school performance and supervise their children's homework. Children from educationally advantaged families also have a lower dropout rate and better school achievement than the average child, and they tend to live in higher income families (McLanahan 1995).

Having a parent who works outside the home (as opposed to receiving welfare) also influences children's future connection to the labor force in several important ways. Children not only need the income that is generated from work; parents who enjoy their work and share their interest in work with their children are positive role models. Finally, the labor force connections employed parents give children later in life becomes important when they are seeking out their own jobs and careers (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Clearly, family income is closely related to family structure, and differences in income account for a substantial proportion of the differences in well-being between

single and married parent households. For children growing up in a single parent household, welfare alone does not appear to make things better for children, but receiving child support has a positive effect on children's schooling outcomes (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Moffitt 1995; Mosley 1996). Perhaps a father who pays child support will be more likely to give time and attention to his children as well as money (Anderson 1990; Jencks and Peterson 1991). Edin (1993) argues that welfare payments for single-mother households are not enough to live on, and mothers often supplement their household income by working in the informal labor market, and collecting (e.g.: diapers, baby formula) informally from their children's fathers. These women are particularly strapped, but some research shows that when this kind of material help is received from members of social networks, it makes a difference in the ability of mother-only households to make ends meet (see Edin and Lein 1997; Stack 1974).

Finally, McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) point out the importance of community connections for raising children to be independent and responsible adults. So far, we have examined social context at the family level but as Van Haitsma (1989) suggests, context can be studied at three levels: household, network and neighborhood. The household is usually the parent's primary social network, influencing labor force attachment by its linkages to employment, division of labor, and financial resources. The influences of neighborhood may interact with household decisions and circumstances making the situation for children even more complicated to untangle. In this case, neighborhood effects consist of local employment opportunities, education and training programs, public transportation, public and private support like health care, child care,

food, and clothing (Anderson 1990, 1991). Research on effects of growing up in a poor neighborhood suggests that children experience disadvantages from stressful and disruptive events, such as changes in residence, changing schools, breaking friendships and other important social ties in a community (Haveman and Wolfe 1994, Duncan 1996).

Compared to two-parent families, then, there may be simply less money, time, and patience to spread around a one-parent family. Mothers heading families on their own may feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of the job, and overloaded with its burdens. Housework, childrearing and employment constitute two (or more) full-time jobs. Sharing the daily tasks of childrearing (e.g.: transportation to soccer games) with other family members, friends, partners, and community centers may ease the strain of raising children in a one-parent household. These strategies allow the mother to tend to the roles and responsibilities that are most important to their children's well-being and fulfilling to themselves (Sussman and Steinmetz 1987: 413).

In an article on family structure and nonmarital childbearing, Burton (1995: 154) cautions that sociologists have not been precise in specifying *which* single mothers they are generalizing about -- unmarried or married, poor or not-poor, teenage or adult mother -- when examining what problems and practices are passed along from one generation to the next. She suggests that sorting out family structure is more difficult than many people realize because many children now spend some time in a single parent home. Trends away from marriage since the 1960s have followed roughly the same direction for blacks and whites, so it is likely that similar kinds of resources matter for all mother-headed

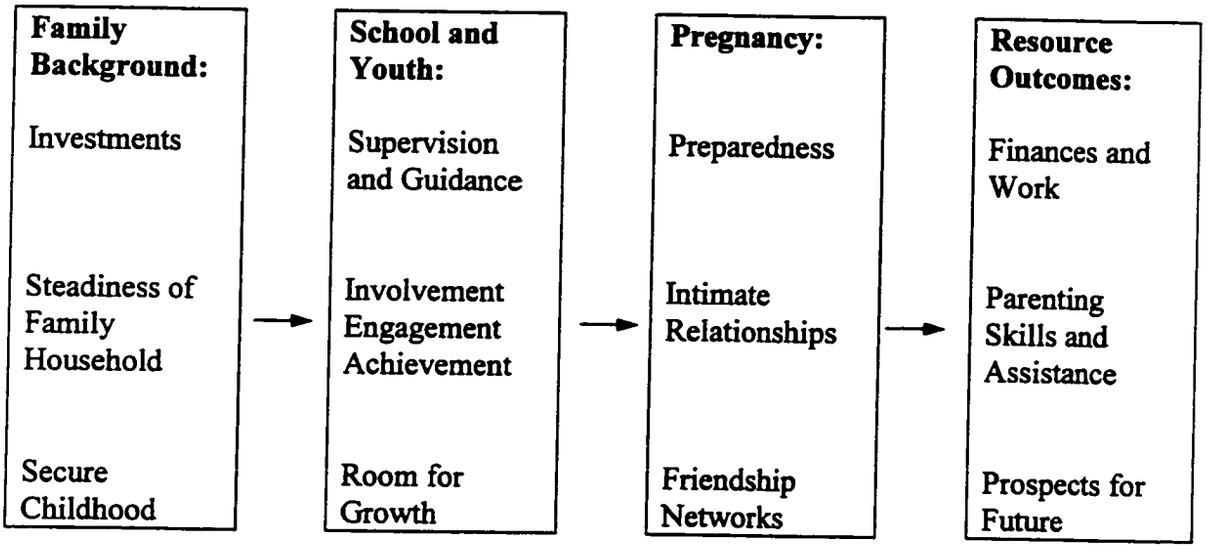
households regardless of their race, age, or class (Cherlin 1992). According to the available evidence, families of all types need a secure income, adequate supervision, and ties to communities, regardless of whether their parents are married. How can these families be assured of these resources?

Seventy-four percent of white women heading families worked part-time or full-time and 25 percent of these working families were still living below the poverty level. Low-income is the biggest single factor associated with negative outcomes for mother-headed families. As responsibility for wage earning shifts away from the male head of household and becomes more equally balanced between two workers, women will gain power (Morrissey 1987: 304). Wages remain low for most women, however. In situations when earning power between men and women are similar or equal, women are more likely to leave unhappy marriages and form their own households. These working women may be able to maintain their financial independence as single parents through their own work as well as by requesting help from their own parents who may be retired from the work world, but who could provide them with material help (from savings accounts) and nonmaterial help (baby-sitting and transportation).

Social class position influences how married, single-parent and extended families accumulate resources to organize their households. Rayna Rapp (1992:171) argues that people "pool resources and perform certain tasks" within their households. These units "vary systematically in their ability to hook into, accumulate, and transmit wealth, wages, or welfare" (Rapp 1992: 169-170). Families include an "extensive network of kin relations that people may activate selectively" (Rapp 1992: 170). She suggests that poor

and working-class families "dispense material and economic resources laterally" whereas middle-class people "invest lineally between parents, children and grandchildren" (1992:183). These styles of investment reflect the levels of resources readily available in higher- and lower-income families. Poor families are likely to have more needy members and fewer tangible assets; middle-class families are likely to have more to give and fewer takers. As shown in the conceptual model, mothers are better prepared to provide for their households and make plans for the future when they have had steady resources and guidance through their earlier years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



This chapter has highlighted some of the findings about the resources and the roles of women in working-class families in the United States. It is not an exhaustive summary, but it captures several major themes in the literature. While discussions of these families have focused on a patriarchal, conservative, rigid organization of family life, modern working-class families resemble the middle class in their values of

respectability and achievement, and the lower class in their emphasis on kinship. I briefly reviewed some of the economic and demographic explanations for changes in family structure and summarized the negative and positive consequences of single motherhood. One source of difficulty when assessing the effects of single motherhood is that most existing research focuses on young teenage mothers, and we know less about nonmarital fertility and childrearing by adult mothers. New research needs to examine the intersection of socioeconomic status and single motherhood. When and why do women separate childbearing from marriage? How are never married mothers different from other single mothers? What family resources and support networks promote economic security in single parent families? My study answers these questions by exploring income, resources, and security in female headed family-households.

CHAPTER III

SAMPLE AND METHODS

This chapter describes the design and implementation of my research on the causes, contexts, and consequences of single motherhood. I begin by describing the methodological approach used to answer my research questions. Then, I describe the research site and sample. Next, I give a detailed explanation of data management for this project, the phases of data analysis, validity and reliability, and problems I encountered in the course of conducting this study. The interview guide is reproduced in Appendix B.

The Research Approach

The basic question at the beginning of my study was, What is the variation in social and economic resources available to mother-headed families? This broad question informed all my interviews and observations, and led me to develop other researchable questions. Aware that the policy debates over single motherhood are embedded in a debate about persistent poverty in urban settings, I began to examine the connection between family structure and poverty in rural areas. There is a growing body of research pointing to the distinctness and diversity of families in rural areas (Lichter and McLaughlin 1995, Lyson and Falk 1993, Fitchen 1991), and in the early planning stages of this project I decided to conduct research in a nonmetropolitan setting. I was curious about the variation within the category labeled female headed households by the Bureau of the Census, and wanted to know whether the explanations offered for family changes in urban areas were appropriate for understanding mother-headed families in rural areas.

In Tell Them Who I Am, Elliot Liebow reminds us that that sociologists often become so involved in making generalizations about categories of individuals, we lose the texture of individual lives. Using in-depth interviewing and participant observation techniques, I was interested in discovering both similarities and differences among the women I interviewed. In his methodological chapter, Liebow writes, "There is always the danger of going too far in smoothing out data curves by ignoring important outliers, or of underreporting exceptions because we believe they are, indeed, exceptions. Only exceptionally do we use exceptions to prove (literally test) the rule" (1993: 320). In my study I paid careful attention to the trends in the data as well as the outliers -- those interviews that at first made it so difficult for me to see patterns in my sample of unmarried mothers. Since I conducted the interviews over a one-year period, I was constantly comparing the women's stories, or my cases, as the project developed.

The entry into the field is sometimes the most difficult obstacle facing a researcher planning a new project because it involves establishing trust and rapport with important contacts in the study site (Whyte 1955, 1984; Lofland and Lofland 1995). This is normally true regardless of whether the researcher enters the field from "above" -- by forming relationships with people who hold positions of authority in the community and therefore can be helpful for introducing the researcher to others who fit the sample characteristics -- or from "the center" -- by meeting people who fit the sample parameters themselves. Because my initial interactions in the field were made while working on a related research project (see Duncan, Lamborghini, and Walsh 1993), I faced an easier introduction to the research setting. After formulating my preliminary research question

and choosing an appropriate site for the project, I was ready to make the necessary phone calls to reach an appropriate sample and to begin using my techniques for data collection which are described below.

The Interview Sample

One of the key studies on unmarried mothers is Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur's Growing Up With A Single Parent, What Hurts, What Helps (1994). Drawing on data from four national longitudinal studies, they argue that "children raised apart from one of their parents are less successful in adulthood than children raised by both parents, and that many of their problems arise from a loss of income, parental involvement and supervision, and ties to the community" (1994: 135). The authors give clear reasons for the disadvantages facing many children of single parents, but their study also raised questions about why some of those family members manage more successfully than others. I was interested in the families where there was no "loss of" a parent, hypothesizing that there would be differences between households in which children were being raised by a mother alone and a mother living with another person, since many single parents are not actually "single" but unmarried women with long-term partners. I began to wonder, Under what circumstances have they made the decision to raise children outside of marriage? What are these men and women's lives like? What are they able to offer their children? What kind of help is available to them from their families and communities?

After conducting several open-ended pre-test interviews with a convenience sample of unmarried adult mothers located through my volunteer work at a local adult

education program and General Educational Development (GED) center, I made some decisions about whom I would interview for the study and modified the interview guide. Because I was interested in understanding the lives of those single mothers who have been largely left out of the research literature, I narrowed the parameters of my sample to white women in their twenties and thirties who are custodial mothers of one or more children under the age of five. According to Theodora Ooms' article in a recent report to Congress on out of wedlock childbearing, this population currently makes up the largest group of single mothers in the United States (1995: 257). Since the focus of the study was on variation among women heading households, I needed to interview women with a range of family, educational, and work experiences.

My first contacts in the community were three professional women who have lived and worked in the region for a number of years in a variety of community institutions ranging from education to health care. After making preliminary decisions about the sample, I arranged meetings with the directors of three of the largest child care centers in a rural county in northern New England. This institutional setting was the appropriate place for locating unmarried mothers because many single women with children rely on centers to care for their children when they are at work or in school. One of these centers was Tri-County Head Start, one was a pre-school at a community college, and the other was a privately funded learning center. There were also a number of child care providers in the area who were certified and paid hourly by parents or who received child care reimbursement through Title XX funding, and I eventually approached three of them. This rural county was an ideal community context for exploring changes in family

structure because it has a relatively low migration rate. It is a place where multiple generations of households often live within walking distance, and neighbors tend to know one another. Like many other nonmetropolitan areas of the northeast United States, the majority of its workers are employed in manufacturing and the service sector. The study county also has a high percentage of women in the labor force and a large number of men and women with post-secondary education (Bureau of the Census, 1990).

I requested cooperation from child care centers that served primarily low income families as well as privately funded and non-profit preschools serving mainly working families. Through them, I was able to interview women from different economic circumstances. I asked the directors of these centers to distribute a note to parents in which I explained that I was a graduate student writing a paper about the lives of single mothers and their families, and I asked them to return the form if they were interested in talking to me. I knew that it might increase participation if I could meet the parents. The teachers at these centers also allowed me to stand by and introduce myself when parents were dropping off and picking up their children. These were the busiest times at the centers, of course, so I was able to chat informally, catch bits of conversation, and observe parent-child interaction this way. When I exhausted these sources, I had completed 30 interviews. At this point I had collected enough data on women enrolled in the community technical college and working women using formal day care but I had less response from the Head Start families. In order to make comparisons I needed to reach more mothers with a high school education or less, and I also hoped to find more households with informal child care arrangements. With this in mind, I tried two other

ways to recruit participants. Since one goal of my study was to explore the social networks of single mothers, I telephoned the women I had interviewed earlier and asked them for the name of a friend, acquaintance, or neighbor who is also a single mother; and I interviewed nine unmarried mothers using this technique. Only two of the women I contacted declined to be interviewed: one woman worked irregular shifts and could not schedule appointments in advance, and another initially agreed to the interview, but canceled three times. I also visited the town's health clinic and asked them to distribute a letter describing my project which I again described very simply as a study of how single mothers and their families are coping in smaller towns. I contacted 16 mothers using this source.

Overall, I interviewed 50 women with a broad range of work, education, and income characteristics. Although my theoretical framework was not in place at the time, I knew that there were patterns and differences in the kinds of connections some of the women had with their communities. A number of women pointed to particular institutions that made a difference for them, usually at school or work programs. I decided to contact those people -- welfare workers, teachers, business owners, religious leaders -- who were named by more than one woman. I spoke either over the phone or in person with 10 community leaders about their work in the region, their reflections of changes in the community, and their own family histories. These women and men provided me with important information and fresh insights about why they do what they do, and I use their insights as supplementary data.

When designing the interview guide, I standardized both questions and format for

all the interviews (see Appendix B). I did this for two reasons. First, I wanted reliable results, assuming that repeated themes would allow me to be more confident about my findings. Second, I wanted to make it possible for others to replicate this study in other settings if they needed or wanted to do so, although this is rare in in-depth interview studies. In some ways, I also felt that a structured (or at least semi-structured) interview guide was the best way to minimize intrusion in the women's lives. My interview touched on sensitive topics from sexual relationships to pregnancy, abortion, and welfare, and I wanted to establish a comfortable format in which we could move through each participants' life history and cover these topics as they happened. In designing the guide, I considered the ethics of each question as I wrote it. I did not offer information about myself until the interview was over. With minor exceptions, the questions I developed worked quite well from the beginning. The pre-test interviews prompted me to add, subtract, and re-word a few questions, but I kept the vast majority of them and used them with each respondent. I did, however, vary the probes for some questions, and to treat the problem of internal reliability, I repeated some questions as the interview progressed. For example, I asked women several questions about their current serious relationship (if they had one) and their views on marriage during the first half of the interview. Sometimes I would hear a response like "I never will marry again." One of my final questions returned to the issue of marriage, asking whether they might like to marry their current partner in the future. Occasionally, I would receive a very different answer, "Well, the way it's going right now, no, but I won't rule it out."

All of the women I interviewed were white unmarried adults. I interviewed 25

never married women and 25 ever-married women -- 15 divorced, and 10 separated or widowed at the time of the interview. The majority of these women grew up in rural northern New England, although almost half have also lived in other places. Most grew up in families with parents making their living in traditionally working-class jobs in factories and mills; some are from middle-class and poor backgrounds. Most lived in households with both parents during their childhood; one-third of their parents divorced and remarried while they were young. Only three of the 50 did not live with either birth parent as children. All of their mothers have worked outside the home, although many stayed home when their children were young if they had husbands who worked at a steady full-time job.

Because of an expanding community college system in the region, the proportion of women in my sample with some college education are overrepresented. However, about half of the women currently attending college did not graduate from high school. They dropped out, completed the GED course, passed the exam, and then enrolled in college-level courses. In most cases these were women who had been away from school for years and were returning to complete their high school degree with some help from state public assistance. Almost two-thirds of my sample received some type of cash assistance (AFDC), or non-cash benefits over the past five years (Food Stamps, Medicaid, HUD housing help, or child care reimbursement), and about half were "on aid" at the time of the interview. Other characteristics of the 50 study participants are summarized as follows:

Table 3. Sample Characteristics (N=50)

	Number	Percentage
Age		
18-23	12	24%
24-29	23	46
30-35	10	20
36-40	5	10
Education		
Dropout	10	20
High School	18	36
Some College	18	36
B.A.	4	8
Number of Children		
1	14	28
2	22	44
3+	14	28
Number Born Out of Wedlock		
0	18	36
1	18	36
2+	14	28

For this sample, the average age at first pregnancy for never-married women was 19 and for the divorced and separated women it was 20 years. Of the 25 women who have been married, 10 of them married while they were pregnant with their first child. These marriages ranged in length from four months to nine years, with most separating after living together for two or three years. Of the 50 mothers, 37 conceived at least one child out of wedlock. Although many have received some type of state assistance at one time or another, virtually all of these women rely first and foremost on private resources, help from their families, which allows them to purchase goods for their children, pay their

bills, and survive as single parents. While they express feelings of guilt about receiving public assistance -- one woman asked if I knew to whom she should address a thank-you note at the welfare office -- the "private" aid received by these women from their families continues after the monthly AFDC check and welfare reform time limits run out.

Data Collection: Interviews and Field Observations

In each interview I asked open- and closed-ended questions that covered seven areas. As shown in the conceptual model, financial and social resources are accumulated throughout one's life (see Chapter II). Below are some examples of main topics and interview questions I asked the study participants:

- *Family Background:* Where did the interview participant grow up? With whom did she live? What were her parents' (or guardian's) marital, educational, and work history? Siblings? Family income, property and other assets? What were her parents' (or guardian's) childrearing practices, discipline and curfews? What was her parents' religion?
- *School and Youth*: What was the highest grade she completed in school? What were the details of her academic successes and failures? What was the school atmosphere? Did she have teachers or other adults who were role models? Who were the members of her peer group? What was her social life as a teenager including her own and friends' risky behavior, aspirations and expectations for work and education?
- *Preparedness for Childbearing:* What were the background circumstances of her pregnancy? What was her immediate reaction to her first pregnancy? Was it planned or accidental? Were there any discussions of abortion, adoption, or other

alternatives? With whom? What are the details of her child's father's work history and social stability? What were the reactions of relatives to pregnancy? How much ease or difficulty did she have making the transition from youth to single motherhood? How "ready" was she for children compared to her peers, siblings, and father of child? What was the level of social stigma in the community for out-of-wedlock childbearing at the time of her pregnancy?

- *Relationships, Men and Marriage:* How much sexual experience did she have at the time of her first pregnancy? Was she involved in a serious committed relationship at the time? What were her early and later views of marriage, gender roles, and cohabitation? What is a 'good man'? Does she expect to marry in the future?
- *Family and Non-Family Networks:* Whose opinions does she value? What are her close friends' patterns of childbearing, marriage, and work? Do they have more or less help than herself? What is her own level of support extended by family of origin during periods of economic hardship? Is there reciprocity of relationships and pooling of income and information? How does she compare her own choices and constraints to her mothers'?
- *Work Experiences:* What is her own work history, including pay, schedule, benefits, and working conditions? What is her educational attainment, training and skills? What are her employment preferences? Are there opportunities in the community for good stable jobs? Is she willing to move away to find work?
- *Other Resources*: How does she make ends meet? How much is her own earned income and/or public assistance? Does she receive financial help, emotional help,

and/or child care from the child's father? What, if any, resources does she receive from her family of origin, relatives, friends and neighbors? What institutional or community services are available to her? Does she take participate in or take advantage of these services?

The in-depth interviews were tape recorded, and after each interview I wrote field notes describing the interview setting and observations about the participant and our interactions, highlights of our conversation before and after the formal interview, and any thoughts that occurred to me at the time. In all cases, I tried to write up my notes as soon as possible after the interview. Since I would normally conduct no more than two interviews per day, I usually had time to process the details of one case before moving on to the next. Sometimes, I did conduct three interviews in one day, and in these cases, I recorded my thoughts on tape while driving to the next interview. Because I was too hurried in these instances, this was not an ideal way to record field notes, but I still captured my observations immediately after the interview, and sometimes used the tape recorder to dictate what I saw as themes and emerging patterns. All of the interview tapes were transcribed by a professional typist, and as I read through each interview, I checked the transcript against the original tape for accuracy. I conducted these interviews in a variety of settings, but as often as possible, I scheduled the appointments to take place in the woman's home or apartment. Meeting in the woman's own home was convenient and comfortable, and often it allowed me an important opportunity to meet her children, family members, boyfriends and ex-husbands, neighbors and friends. In most cases, I was able to observe parenting styles, see family photographs, crafts and artwork, and feel

the atmosphere in which the households function on a day-to-day basis. Arguably, it was somewhat artificial -- I saw only a slice of what they "do" as a parent -- yet these instances helped me understand the link between what they said about their lives as single parents and the physical environment inside their household. Occasionally, conducting the interviews in the home was difficult -- telephones rang, chores had to be done, and children needed to be entertained and fed. During one interview a toddler dumped my entire briefcase on the floor and started ripping up pieces of paper! I began to carry crayons, books, and puzzles with me to share with the children while I borrowed their mothers. When privacy at home was a problem, we arranged to meet for coffee at Dunkin' Donuts, ice cream at the dairy bar, or in a small conference room in the town library. In one case, we sat on swings at the park until it got dark outside and then finished the interview sitting in my car. The interviews lasted from one to four hours, but most were under two hours, and if an interview was cut short, I tried to reschedule a follow-up interview for another day. Since I was living in the community for weeks at a time, I occasionally ran into the women I interviewed on "Main Street", and talked informally with them.

Using Lotus Notes to Analyze Qualitative Data

I organized and analyzed the interview data in several steps. Bearing in mind my observation that few qualitative researchers write careful methodological appendices to their field studies, I tried to be meticulous about recording exactly what I did at each stage of the project. Huberman and Miles complained that "analysis methods were rarely reported in enough detail for readers to follow how a researcher got from 3,600 pages of

field notes to the final conclusions" (1994: 428). To remedy this problem, I used Lotus Notes software for data management, storage and retrieval, and relied on several field methods handbooks for guidance (Bailey 1996; Ragin 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Miles and Huberman 1994). Before beginning to collect data, I gave some thought to how I would process the interviews. It was necessary for me to have the audiotapes transcribed verbatim because I would need to use exact quotations in my writing, but I was concerned that the typist (no matter how proficient) would inevitably make mistakes. Each 60 minute recording on audiotape was translated into approximately 120 double spaced typed pages and some of these interviews were longer. Upon receiving a completed transcript in question-and-answer format from the typist, I listened to each tape and made corrections to the computer file when necessary. The quality of the recording depended on the background noise and the volume of the speakers' voices. Often proper names, phrases, colloquial expressions, and other details were not picked up by the transcriber but while listening to the tapes that I could easily fill in the missing information. This process was time consuming but unavoidable: the data had to be cleaned so that I could be confident of my interpretations of the subtle, textured differences among women's stories.

I organized a computer file of the interview and field notes for each case and then made a physical file containing notes of my telephone calls and conversations with each person, the audiotape, and a hard copy of the transcription. In addition to the raw materials mentioned above, I followed Huberman and Miles' checklist of ten items that should be kept in a safe place during and after a qualitative project. These include:

partially processed data, coded data, drafts of the coding scheme or thesaurus, the researcher's memos or reflections on the conceptual meaning of the data, search records showing exploratory links among segments of the data, charts and matrices displaying data, step by step documentation of how the displays were assembled, written drafts of the manuscript, a chronological log of all procedures, and finally, and index of the entire design and analysis process (1994: 431, Table 27.1).

Lotus Notes offers a generic discussion database format with a main document and response documents. My adviser and I adapted these for interviews using a cover sheet as the main document and dividing the body of the interview into sequential response documents each with fields. In order to create a database and format the interviews using Lotus Notes software, I designed a cover sheet for each interview containing a file name and a pseudonym. For the file name, I merely numbered the interview from one to 50 chronologically and added the first letter of their name. Since I had assured my participants of confidentiality, I could not use their real name when quoting from the interviews, so I assigned a false name to each woman and included it on the cover sheet. Using my research questions as a guide, I made separate fields for a number of background characteristic of their parents, including their ages, marital status, number of children, education and work history. I also created fields for recording information about the participant and her children including descriptions of their household situation, number of adults, number of children, public assistance and income from earnings. As I formulated theoretical ideas about the study, I added more fields to the cover sheet and deleted others (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Cover Sheet

Family Background	Pregnancy & Relationships
age [#] where grow up[town or county] with parents [yes, no] # siblings [#] mother's age when born [#] mother's occupation [list jobs] father's age when born [#] parents married now [yes, no] # years parents married [#] father's occupation [list jobs] childhood problems [fill-in] brothers' ages [#] sisters' ages [#] Housing lived away [state or region] # adults in household now [#] # children in household now [#] housing type now [apt, condo, house, subsidized, trailer] rent per month [$] School highest grade completed [grade] dropout [yes, no] school problems [LD, fighting, alcohol, drugs, trouble, none] school activities [clubs, sports, work] supervision [curfews, homework, discipline, other limits] role models [relationship] teen sex [yes, no] protected sex [yes, no] aspirations [write-in] Finances & Networks public assistance [afdc, med, stamps, dis, unem, hsg, title 20] private assistance [food pantry, shelter, clinic, heating, other] child care [family, friends, center]	marital status now [div, sep, nm] # children [#] children's ages [list] age first pregnant [#] status when pregnant [work, sch, other] planned pregnancy [yes, no] best age to have children [#, none] good things @ children [list] hard things @ children [list] father's age when child born [#] child's father's status then [wk, sch. other] child's father's status now [wk, sch, other] child's father's occupation [list] child's father's highest grade [grade] their relationship status [rel] other relationships [none, few, many] age first had sex [#] current relationship [yes, no, maybe] quality of good man [work ethic, education, loyal, caring, money] marriage in future [yes, no, maybe] best age for marriage [#, none] wife should expect [write-in] husband should expect [write-in] more children in future [yes, no, maybe] birth control now [pill, tubal, condom, rhythm, abstain, none] Work occupations [list jobs] good parts @ work [list] bad parts @ work [list] would move for work [yes, no, maybe] would get training for work [yes, no, maybe]

After designing a preliminary cover and a main document for each interview, I designed a compatible response or sub-document form for the pages of the interview, organizing them into manageable records. I divided the text for each case by size and topic so that there were about 40 single-spaced records for a 60 minute interview. Working with these smaller sections of text, I could read through the interview, code and write notes in appropriate fields, much like I might write in the margins of a hard copy transcript, but I could save them and compare these memos with those on the same section of the other interviews.

All of the interviews were stored together in a 42 MB database so that the 2,103 documents were linked to each other and multiple cases could be easily compared. In addition to the cover sheet and interview record forms, Lotus Notes "views" are another useful feature of the Lotus Notes software program that we adapted for qualitative analysis of interview data. In Lotus Notes a "view" presents various fields of data from documents, permitting "views" using the fields from the cover sheets. At first, I experimented with designing displays that listed the participants' age and marital status with their education, occupation, and income since I expected to see differences within the sample based on these characteristics. Since I saw no interesting comparisons based on those characteristics, I made a view linking the participant's education, occupation, and income with their parent's class background. I began to see a pattern in this display suggesting that the women who grew up in very poor households were also poor as single parents, while the women with incomes above the poverty level or those enrolled in college grew up in families with steady work histories. I then was able to hypothesize

that there might be a threshold of parental resources under which it made it difficult for women to succeed in their adult lives as single mothers (see Figure 3).

As I continued to design displays of the cover sheet data, I was always able to step back and re-read the notes and codes I wrote on the interview records, but to make quick comparisons I also needed a biographical profile of each interview participant. On the cover sheet I made four text fields and labeled them Childhood, Adolescence, Transitions, and Adulthood. I then reviewed my field notes and memos from the interview records and summarized the major events that happened in each woman's life during each time periods. For example, one woman lived with an adoptive family for several years when she was young, and I made a note of that in her childhood profile. Another woman told me that she and her best friend got pregnant at virtually the same time, just before high school graduation, and they moved in together. When I designed the next view, I combined fields showing educational attainment and future aspirations with the summary profiles. I could then look for patterns in these women's lives at several points in time.

This analysis process led me to develop three sensitizing concepts that were helpful for explaining why some women were managing as single mothers more successfully than others (Ragin 1994: 87). Drawing on the family coping literature, I used the cover sheets and views to examine differences among women's ability to make ends meet financially, supervise and take care of their children, and plan for the future. I developed an elementary rating system of "good", "satisfactory", and "needs help" for each dimension of family coping, and then I made a view counting the total score for each

case. When looking at how women were making ends meet, I had much information to consider: their own income, bills and debts, child support, level of sharing with, and borrowing from, family and friends, their reliance on public assistance - both in the past and now, and their own perceptions of their household financial situation. No one in the sample made an annual salary over $35,000 which was the state median family income for 1996, but those who fared well were working steadily and receiving at least some employment benefits for their children, and were able to pay their bills. Women in the "satisfactory" group often were in school themselves, combining work and welfare, or had a partner or parent who provided financial assistance to their children. The group who needed the most help were not working at all, and had little help from friends and family, although they were receiving public assistance.

Figure 3. Lotus Notes Analysis Views

Sorted by Eduction of Participant:

Case	Own Ed	Mother's Work	M's Educ.	Father's Work	F's Educ.
6	bachelors	teacher	MA	newspaper	coll
13	associates	seamstress, nursing	GED	mill	HS
17	associates	mgr for tupperware	dropout	painter	HS
19	associates	nursing home	coll	mill	coll
4	inassoc	high school sect'y	somecoll	car dealer	dropout
9	inassoc	waitress, sect'y, mill	somecoll	marines	coll
12	inassoc	factory, army	somecoll	mill	somecoll
16	inassoc	waitress, stitcher	HS	flooring	somecoll
21	CNA cert.	garage attendant	dropout	navy	HS
23	CNA cert.	home health	HS	mill	HS
11	HS	Avon sales, waitress	HS	truck driver	HS
18	HS	hand sewer at factory	HS	disabled	GED
20	HS	deli	dropout	machinist	HS
22	HS	nurse	coll	draftsman	HS
24	HS	sales clerk	dropout	mill	dropout
14	GED	fast food, clerk	dropout	welding	dropout
15	inGED	factory, dept. store	dropout	navy, oil man	HS

Sorted by Education of Participant's Mother:

Case	M's Educ.	Mother's Work	Father's Work	F's Educ.	Own Ed
6	MA	teacher	newspaper	coll	bachelors
19	coll	nursing home	mill	coll	associates
22	coll	nurse	draftsman	HS	HS
4	somecoll	high school sect'y	car dealer	dropout	inassoc
9	somecoll	waitress, sect'y, mill	marines	coll	inassoc
12	somecoll	factory, army	mill	somecoll	inassoc
16	HS	waitress, stitcher	flooring	somecoll	inassoc
23	HS	home health	mill	HS	CNA cert.
11	HS	Avon sales, waitress	truck driver	HS	HS
18	HS	hand sewer at factory	disabled	GED	HS
13	GED	seamstress, nursing	mill	HS	associates
17	dropout	mgr for tupperware	painter	HS	associates
21	dropout	garage attendant	navy	HS	CNA cert.
20	dropout	deli	machinist	HS	HS
24	dropout	sales clerk	mill	dropout	HS
14	dropout	fast food, clerk	welding	dropout	GED
15	dropout	factory, dept. store	navy, oil man	HS	inGED

My criteria for "rating" women on parenting consisted of their own responses to several questions: What are the good and the hard things about being a parent? (I asked for a recent example here.) How did you learn to be a parent? What are the most important things about bringing children up? These questions elicited their own values, strengths and difficulties in this area. Those I rated "good" tended to have other adults in the household, be home themselves on a regular basis, and expressed happiness with their child care situation. They were able to supervise and consistently discipline their children with few problems. Those I rated "satisfactory" in this area expressed some difficulties in time management and worry about their own knowledge of "how to" parent, and those in the "needs help" group did not have adequate child care or help as a parent, and expressed much worry about their own skills and knowledge.

For future prospects and goals, more women rated "good" than on the other two aspects of coping. These women had moved off welfare since the birth of their first child, and were studying to enter careers in nursing, computers and small businesses. As mentioned earlier, the presence of a technical college in the area helped women achieve their goals of earning a decent salary. Those in the "needs help" category had weak educational preparation, no work experience, and few marketable skills. I gave the women I interviewed a score on each of the three dimensions of coping one point for "satisfactory", two points for "good", and zero for "needs help" -- assigning each woman an overall outcome sum ranging from zero to six. I then compared cases to see which clusters of women scored higher than others. The 20 women who scored high on the scale (either five or six) were rich in resources, heading "strong" families, and the 15 who

scored low (two or below) were poor in resources, heading "struggling" families.. The remaining 15 women were a combination group who fell in the middle range score of three or four (see Figure 4).

Using this categorization of how they were currently doing or "outcomes", I then compared women's lives in their early years, as teenagers, and while making the transition to adulthood. I performed systematic searches of words and phrases, and compared cases with each other, working back to my original displays showing age and marital status. As Strauss (1987) recommends, I was constantly comparing incidents and concepts, looking for what appeared to be the main concern or problem for the participants in the study at different points in time. Looking closely at my short descriptions of childhood, adolescence, transitions, and adulthood for each case, I could easily move back and forth from expanded interview text to summary data, and thus compare and contrast experiences of many women quickly and efficiently.

There are many ways to approach cross-case analysis using in-depth interviews. As described above, I used both case-oriented and variable-oriented strategies (Huberman and Miles 1994: 436; Ragin 1994: 108-111). At first, I wrote summaries of the themes that emerged in each case, and then I looked for themes that could be found in a number of interviews. For example, I found evidence for prepared pregnancies among some unmarried women. My matrix display showed descriptions like "I was old enough" to "we had been dating a long time" to "my parents told me they would help me finish school." This kind of thematic analysis helped me to group and name the findings.

Figure 4. Lotus Notes Outcome Views

Sorted by Score

File	Name	Finances	Parenting	Future Prospects	Score
08	Ginny	good	good	good	6
17	Carrie	good	good	good	6
22	Jane	good	good	good	6
31	Margot	good	good	good	6
02	Patti	satisfactory	good	good	5
04	Maura	good	satisfactory	good	5
06	Elaine	satisfactory	good	good	5
10	Olivia	satisfactory	good	good	5
11	Sophie	good	good	satisfactory	5
13	Betty	satisfactory	good	good	5
16	Rose	good	satisfactory	good	5
19	Agnes	satisfactory	good	good	5
25	Madeline	satisfactory	good	good	5
28	Hannah	good	good	satisfactory	5
30	Linette	good	good	satisfactory	5
33	Missy	satisfactory	good	good	5
35	Roberta	good	satisfactory	good	5
36	Chris	good	satisfactory	good	5
41	Marianne	good	satisfactory	good	5
45	Polly	good	good	satisfactory	5
09	Marty	satisfactory	satisfactory	good	4
20	Whitney	satisfactory	satisfactory	good	4
21	Michelle	good	satisfactory	satisfactory	4
23	Kathleen	satisfactory	good	satisfactory	4
43	Vanessa	satisfactory	satisfactory	good	4
50	Brigitte	good	satisfactory	satisfactory	4
01	Lisa	needs help	satisfactory	good	3
03	Deborah	satisfactory	satisfactory	satisfactory	3
12	Faith	satisfactory	needs help	good	3
26	Wendy	satisfactory	satisfactory	satisfactory	3
32	Linda	satisfactory	satisfactory	satisfactory	3
34	Yvonne	satisfactory	satisfactory	satisfactory	3
40	Cecile	satisfactory	satisfactory	satisfactory	3
46	Jenny	satisfactory	satisfactory	satisfactory	3

47	Ronnie	satisfactory	needs help	good	3
05	Frances	satisfactory	needs help	satisfactory	2
07	Larissa	satisfactory	needs help	satisfactory	2
27	Catha	satisfactory	satisfactory	needs help	2
29	Winny	satisfactory	satisfactory	needs help	2
37	Lori	satisfactory	needs help	satisfactory	2
39	Julia	needs help	satisfactory	satisfactory	2
44	Brenda	needs help	satisfactory	satisfactory	2
49	Sandy	satisfactory	needs help	satisfactory	2
18	Penelope	satisfactory	needs help	needs help	1
24	Corey	needs help	satisfactory	needs help	1
38	Clara	satisfactory	needs help	needs help	1
14	Denise	needs help	needs help	needs help	0
15	Stephie	needs help	needs help	needs help	0
42	Felicia	needs help	needs help	needs help	0
48	Corrine	needs help	needs help	needs help	0

Sorted by Group and Outcome I: Finances

	Earnings	Assets	Assistance	Score
Strong:				
Patti	full-time, flexible $12/hr + benefits	owns new car	child support; Medicaid	1
Maura	part-time work-study job; $5/hr	property from divorce settlement	child support; Medicaid, family	2
Elaine	part-time + benefits $10/hr	inheritance from Mother's death	child support; family	2
Ginny	full-time; $10/hr + benefits	M/D bought car; partner has house	pools income with partner;	2
Olivia	full-time; $9/hr; good benefits	M/D bought car, savings account	family; child support	1
Sophie	almost full-time; $8/hr + benefits	lives in M/D house rent-free	family; child support; involved partner	2
Betty	almost full-time; $7/hr + moonlights	owns house with partner	child support; partner; Medicaid, FS	1
Rose	part-time; $7/hr	M/D bought car; savings account	partner; child support in process	2
Carrie	full-time; $8/hr + benefits	lives in M/D house rent-free	partner; child support, family	2
Agnes	almost full-time; $7/hr + benefits	lives in M/D house rent-free	family; partner	1
Jane	full-time flexible; $10/hr + benefits	owns half of house	involved ex-partner; child support; family	2
Madeline	part-time flexible; $7/hr + benefits	M/D bought furniture	partner	1

Hannah	full-time; $7/hr + benefits	owns house with partner	partner; family	2
Linette	full-time flexible; $9/hr + benefits	owns car	partner; family	2
Margot	full-time flexible $10/hr + benefits	parents paid tuition	family	2
Missy	almost full-time; $8/hr	low rent in M/D apartment	family, welfare	1
Roberta	full-time flexible; $10/hr + benefits	owns house	child support; family	2
Chris	full-time; $9/hr + benefits	low rent in M/D apartment	child support; family	2
Marianne	part-time while in school	M/D bought car	child support; family	2
Polly	almost full-time; $8/hr + benefits	owns car; partner owns house	partner; family	2
Transitional				
Lisa	not working	adoptive parents paid tuition	child support; welfare	0
Deborah	not working	M/D bring groceries and home supplies	family; welfare	1
Marty	part-time; $6/hr	friend gave her a car; rent to own home	welfare	1
Faith	part-time flexible; $7/hr	father paid for one year of college	child support; welfare	1
Whitney	more than part-time flexible; $7/hr	living in ex-partner's house (not for long)	welfare	1
Michelle	part-time; $8/hr	lives with partner	welfare; family	2
Kathleen	not working	lives with partner in relative's house	welfare; network; partner	1
Wendy	not working	M/D bring over groceries	welfare; family	1
Linda	part-time; $7/hr	owns half of house	welfare	1
Yvonne	part-time; $7/hr	lives in partner's house	welfare; network; child support	1
Cecile	part-time flexible; $5/hr	M/D bring over groceries and clothing	welfare; network; child support	1
Vanessa	part-time flexible; $8/hr	network's car	welfare	1
Jenny	almost full-time; $8/hr	owns car	welfare; family; child support	1
Ronnie	more than part-time flexible	owns trailer	welfare; partner	1
Brigitte	full-time flexible; $7/hr	owns car; trying to get back loan	social security (spse died)	2
Struggling				
Frances	not working	M/D bring groceries over	welfare	1
Larissa	not working	M brings groceries and clothing	welfare	1
Denise	part-time; occasionally; $6/hr	none	welfare	1

Stephie	not working	M buys clothes for children	child support; welfare	0
Penelope	not working	M buys clothes for children	child support; welfare	0
Corey	part-time; $7/hr	Grandparents give her money	welfare	0
Catha	not working	none	welfare	1
Winny	part-time; $6/hr	partner's earnings	welfare	1
Lori	not working	none	welfare; child support	1
Clara	not working	none	welfare	1
Julia	part-time $7/hr	partner's earnings	welfare; child support	0
Felicia	part-time; $6/hr	partner's earning (splitting up)	welfare	1
Brenda	part-time; $6/hr	partner's earnings	welfare	0
Corrine	not working	none (foster homes)	welfare	0
Sandy	not working	none	welfare	1

Sorted by Group and Outcome II: Parenting

	Information and skills	Support	#Children #Adults	Score
Strong				
Patti	cared for brothers; child care center	many friends; no partner	2 children 1 adult	2
Maura	watching mother	many friends; no partner	3 children 1 adult	1
Elaine	baby-sitting child care center parenting classes	children's father is involved	2 children 1 adult	2
Ginny	trained in school	children's father is involved; mother	1 child 2 adults	2
Olivia	trained in school	large family; no partner	1 child 1 adult	2
Sophie	child care center watching mother	family; involved partner	2 children 1 adult	2
Betty	watching mother Head Start	large family; many friends	2 children 1 adult	2
Rose	watching good older friends; child care center	family; many friends	2 children 2 adults	1
Carrie	watching mother and sisters; baby-sitting	large family; many friends	2 children 2 adults	2
Agnes	watching parents; baby-sitting trained in school	family	1 child 3 adults	2
Jane	watching mother and good friends	many friends; involved child's father	1 child 1 adult	2

Madeline	trained in school	involved partner	2 children 1 adult	2
Hannah	watching parents trained in school	involved partner; family	2 children 2 adults	2
Linette	watching mother	large family; involved ch father	2 children 1 adult	2
Margot	trained in school watching mother	large family; many friends	1 child 1 adult	2
Missy	watching mother	family	1 child 1 adult	2
Roberta	trained in school	involved ch father; many friends	2 children 1 adult	1
Chris	watching parents	involved ch father	1 child 1 adult	1
Marianne	watching parents child care center	family	1 child 1 adult	1
Polly	watching parents trained in school	involved partner	1 child 2 adults	2
Transitional				
Lisa	watching adoptive mother child care center	many friends	3 children 1 adult	1
Deborah	watching parents trained in school	family involved ch father	1 child 1 adult	1
Marty	watching mother child care center	many friends	3 children 1 adult	1
Faith	watching mother and good friend	family and friends	1 child 1 adult	0
Whitney	Head Start	none	2 children 1 adult	1
Michelle	Head Start	one friend	2 children (preg) 1 adult	1
Kathleen	watching grandmother	many friends; involved partner	3 children 2 adults	2
Wendy	reading and watching mother	church	1 child 1 adult	1
Linda	watching mother Head Start	one friend	1 child 1 adult	1
Yvonne	reading and friends	involved partner	1 child 2 adults	1
Cecile	reading, classes, child care center	church; involved partner	1 child 1 adult	1
Vanessa	watching mother	one friend; network	1 child 1 adult	1
Jenny	watching mother child care center	many friends	1 child 1 adult	1
Ronnie	Head Start and other classes	involved partner and friends	3 children 2 adults	0
Brigitte	baby-sitting watching mother	many friends mother	3 children 1 adult	1
Struggling				
Frances	watching mother "can't get ready"	friends; partner	3 children 1 adult	0

Larissa	watching mother	one friend	3 children 1 adult	0
Denise	nothing	two friends; family	3 children 1 adult	0
Stephie	watching relatives child care center	one friend; occasionally child's father	2 children 1 adult	0
Penelope	watching mother reading; Head Start	one friend	5 children 1 adult	0
Corey	nothing	many friends	2 children 1 adult	1
Catha	watching mother	occasionally child's father	1 child 1 adult	1
Winny	watching parents reading	many friends; involved partner	4 children 2 adults	1
Lori	nothing	involved child's father	2 children 1 adult	0
Clara	watching mother	one friend; family	1 child 1 adult	0
Julia	watching mother	two friends; family	2 children 2 adults	1
Felicia	nothing	occasionally children's father	2 children 2 adults	0
Brenda	watching mother classes	two friends	1 child 2 adults	1
Corrine	nothing	two friends	3 children 1 adult	0
Sandy	classes	one friend	1 child 1 adult	0

Sorted by Group and Outcome III: Future Prospects

	Work	Education	Family/ Relationships	Score
Strong				
Patti	wants to run a trucking company	A.A. degree	joint custody; no plans for marriage	2
Maura	wants to teach	in associates	not dating; no plans for marriage	2
Elaine	manager at a campground; wants change	B.A.	may reunite with children's father	2
Ginny	counselor at mental health	B.A. wants to get masters	staying with partner	2
Olivia	preschool administrator	B.A.	not dating; wants to marry	2
Sophie	manager at fast food	high school wants to get college degree	engaged	1
Betty	both secretary and cashier; wants to work one job	A.A.	staying with partner	2
Rose	wants to work as	finishing A.A.	engaged	2

	bookkeeper; liked business internship			
Carrie	receptionist; wants better pay	A.A.	joint custody; staying with partner	2
Agnes	both hairdresser and clerk; wants to work one job	high school cosmetology license	not dating; wants to marry	2
Jane	office manager; content with job	high school	recent split with ex-partner	2
Madeline	wants to continue in human services	in associates	serious with partner; wants to marry	2
Hannah	receptionist; wants to be a writer	A.A.	engaged	1
Linette	secretary; content with job	one year of college	not dating but wants to	1
Margot	nurse; content with job	A.A. wants to go for B.A.	not dating; no plans for marriage	2
Missy	technician in pharmacy	one year of college	dating; no plans for marriage	2
Roberta	bookkeeper; content with job	one year of college	not dating; no plans for marriage	2
Chris	accountant; content with job	almost B.A.	not dating	2
Marianne	wants to work as a nursing assistant	finishing associates	not dating	2
Polly	wants to be RN	high school and CNA	serious with partner	1
Transitional				
Lisa	wants to operate a business	finishing A.A.	dating; no plans for marriage	2
Deborah	wants to be a nurse	beginning A.A.	not dating but wants to marry	1
Marty	wants to be computer tech	finishing associates	dating but not seriously	2
Faith	wants to be an accountant; liked internship	finishing associates	serious with partner	2
Whitney	cook	high school	not dating	2
Michelle	likes working at nursing home	high school and CNA	serious with partner	1
Kathleen	would like to be a nurse	high school and CNA and cosmetology	serious with partner	1
Wendy	housekeeper in hotel; wants more	high school	not dating; no plans for marriage	1
Linda	wants to cater parties for work	dropped out GED	not dating; wants to marry	1
Yvonne	cafe in hospital; wants more	high school and one year of college	engaged	1
Cecile	teaching and volunteering	high school	not dating; no plans to marry	1
Vanessa	clerk; wants more	high school and CNA	not dating	2
Jenny	supermarket; not sure what next	high school	seriously dating	1

Ronnie	soap business	dropped out	serious with partner	2
Brigitte	WREN business	dropped out and GED	not dating seriously	1
Struggling				
Frances	wants to work in an office	GED beginning associates	steadily dating but divorce is not final	1
Larissa	wants to be a CNA	in associates	not dating; in process of divorce	1
Denise	personal care attendant; not sure what next	GED	not dating; separated	0
Stephie	not sure	in GED	not dating; no plans for marriage	0
Penelope	wants to work at own business but not specific	high school	not dating; no plans for marriage	0
Corey	not sure	correspondence high school	not dating; separated	0
Catha	not sure	dropped out and GED	not dating; separated	0
Winny	looking for full-time work	dropped out and GED	serious with partner	0
Lori	wants to work in office	dropped out and beginning associates	serious with partner	1
Clara	looking for full-time work	high school	not dating; no plans for marriage	1
Julia	nursing home now; not sure next	high school	serious with partner	1
Felicia	housekeeper now; not sure next	high school	splitting with partner	0
Brenda	nursing home; wants more	high school and CNA	serious with partner	1
Corrine	soap business	in GED	no partner; no plans for marriage	0
Sandy	not sure	in GED	no partner; no plans for marriage	1

As the study progressed, I was careful not to overweight any one piece of evidence and was careful about using representative cases when selecting examples. As a check on my work, I shared some preliminary findings with my contacts in the study community and asked for their comments, reactions, and feedback. I also read the local weekly newspaper for the duration of the study so that I could keep abreast of community events. My procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of New Hampshire before collecting data, and all participants signed a consent form which I attached to their file.

CHAPTER IV

WHO ARE MOTHER-HEADED FAMILIES IN THE 1990S?

This chapter presents an overall picture of the families, households, and neighborhoods of the women I interviewed. These women grew up in families similar in some ways to the working-class families in Komarovsky's (1962) and Rubin's (1976) studies. But they also are part of a new generation of working-class American women who have made different choices and decisions from their mothers -- and even from their older sisters. In the interviews, they reflected on their childhood memories, their aspirations and expectations for education and work in the future, and their connections with extended and immediate families. Some of them are coping better than others as single parents because they have jobs that provide them with enough money to pay their bills, effective parenting skills, adequate child care, and strong networks of support in their families and communities.

Since the 1970s, the economy has changed and most families now need more than one earner in order to support a household (Levy and Michel 1991). For married couples this means that both wives and husbands work, and for mother-only households this means that income must be accumulated by combining their own earnings with either family members, partners, or public assistance. When young adults have trouble supporting themselves, they may turn first to their own parents for help.

Sociologists have recently developed frameworks for understanding how family-related resources can boost the prospects for achievement and the mobility of youth and young adults. James Coleman (1988) writes that families have the potential to offer three things to growing children: family capital (investments of money), human capital (investments of education which lead to the development of work skills) and social capital (investments of time from both families and communities). Building on this theory, Frank Furstenburg and Mary Elizabeth Hughes (1995: 590) found that many dimensions of life experiences -- including how "parents' resources inside the family, their social network, and their embeddedness in the community -- might be related to various arenas of success in early adulthood" (1995: 590). This chapter looks at the study women's parents first, showing their similarities to the working-class families described in the literature. Then I turn to the childhood, schooling, and work experiences of the women themselves to provide a context from which to compare those who are strong and those who are struggling. Finally, I consider how resources and norms affect women's decisions about marriage and motherhood.

Growing Up in Working-Class Homes

New England working-class families are ethnically and religiously diverse. Large numbers of French-Canadian men and women migrated from Montreal and Quebec to Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont in the first part of this century to work in the local paper mills and factories. While their children and grandchildren learned English in school, many spoke only French at home. Scandinavian, Irish, Italian and other European immigrant groups formed their own ethnic enclaves which often included several

generations of related families. The region where I collected data is known for its high mountains and thick forests, and teenagers play hockey in the winter and hike or camp at a nearby lake in the summer. A paper mill has been the major employer for decades, although there are also a number of small factories and family-run businesses in the area. The main street divides the east and west side of town, and people who grew up on the east-side neighborhoods identify those triple-decker houses and apartment buildings as the "wrong side of the tracks". On the west side one sees more single-family homes and larger backyards, but the distinctions are not immediately noticeable to an outside observer. Four Roman Catholic churches are located within walking distance from each other, joined by a Russian Orthodox Church, a Methodist Church and an Episcopalian Church. Since the 1970s the private parochial grammar schools faced decreasing enrollment and recently merged to form a single diocesan school, bringing together students from Catholic as well as non-Catholic backgrounds.

The mothers and fathers of the women in my study sample grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, providing a useful comparison to the working-class families described in Chapter II. Some of their mothers worked as housekeepers in the homes of wealthier families while others found employment as hand sewers in shoe factories and textile mills (see Table 4). Several worked on the staff of tourist hotels and restaurants near the mountains during the summer months. For the most part, these were low-paid low-status jobs and they were anxious to leave them for marriage and motherhood.

Table 4. Working-Class Characteristics of Sample

File	Name	Father's Work	Mother's Work	Mother's Education
01	Lisa	drywall	factory	dropout
02	Patti	sheetrocker, drywall	housekeeper	dropout
03	Deborah	factory, foreman, oil man	stitcher, factory	dropout
04	Maura	car dealer, produce shop	high school sect'y	somecoll
05	Frances	mill, disabled	bank	dropout
06	Elaine	newspaper	teacher	MA
07	Larissa	truck driver	waitress, domestic, CNA	GED
08	Ginny	owned gas station	factory	dropout
09	Marty	marines	waitress, sect'y, mill	somecoll
10	Olivia	purchasing agent	counselor	MA
11	Sophie	truck driver	Avon sales, waitress	HS
12	Faith	mill	factory, army	somecoll
13	Betty	mill	seamstress, nursing asst.	GED
14	Denise	welding	fast food, clerk	dropout
15	Stephie	navy, oil company	factory, dept. store, motel	dropout
16	Rose	air force, flooring	waitress, stitcher, factory	HS
17	Carrie	own painting contractor	Tupperware sales	dropout
18	Penelope	disabled	hand sewer at factory	HS
19	Agnes	mill	red cross, nursing home	coll
20	Whitney	machinist supervisor	deli	dropout
21	Michelle	navy, nuc. power plant	garage attendant	dropout
22	Jane	draftsman	nurse	coll
23	Kathleen	mill	home health, sp. needs	HS
24	Corey	mill	sales clerk	dropout
25	Madeline	boiler-maker	factory, cleaner	dropout
26	Wendy	fixed typewriters	nurse at nursing home	coll
27	Catha	Merchant Marine	AT&T service rep, IGA	HS
28	Hannah	newspaper delivery	nurse	coll
29	Winny	electronics	shampoo factory	HS
30	Linette	cabinet maker	phone operator, bookkeeper	HS
31	Margot	meat cutter, grocery	grocery store, home health	HS
32	Linda	cannery co.	restaurant	HS
33	Missy	cook, longshoreman	watressing, nurse	coll
34	Yvonne	sales	secretary	somecoll
35	Roberta	restaurant	textile mills, restaurant	dropout
36	Chris	newspaper	office asst.	HS
37	Lori	mill	clerk at dept store	dropout

38	Clara	carpentry, fix-it	housekeeping	HS
39	Julia	computers	factory	HS
40	Cecile	factory, gas station, d	factory	HS
41	Marianne	farming, raised chickens	odd jobs, hairdresser	somecoll
42	Felicia	truck driver	shoe factory	HS
43	Vanessa	truck driver, oil delivery	supermarket clerk	GED
44	Brenda	mechanic (step)	none	somecoll
45	Polly	plumbing, construction	waitress, cert. nurse	HS
46	Jenny	mill	shoe factory, clothing store	dropout
47	Ronnie	built boats	waitress, domestic, odd jobs	HS
48	Corrine	factory	fish factory	dropout
49	Sandy	carpenter	factory	dropout
50	Brigitte	construction	domestic, farm, nursing	GED

Like Komarovsky's couples, these men and women preferred to pretend that the wives' wages were "helping out" the family but not essential to its functioning. Women's labor force participation was often interrupted by the birth of children. All the women I interviewed reported that their mothers worked outside the home, but many took time off to stay at home while their children were young.

Patti's parents were typical of how the French-Canadian families managed their work schedules. Her mother helped with part-time wage-earning but since her husband was on the road during the week, she was mostly responsible for childrearing:

> My mother had a hard time working because she only spoke French. She never learned English. When we were in school she worked as a housekeeper in a rest home... a nursing home. She only went as far as eighth grade herself. That was about all she could do. My father always spoke French at home... not as much once we moved. In his type of business, there were a lot of French-speaking people but he still learned how to speak English on the job. He was a sheetrocker. Did drywall. He worked for a company. But my brother now owns his own company, which is the same stuff. Dad worked out of town. Like, he was gone Sunday night and came back Friday. So, Mom was basically home with us all the time.

Work patterns in northern New England followed national trends, and women entered the labor force in large numbers in the 1960s. 1970 Census figures for the county show that 71 percent of eligible male workers were employed compared to 37 percent of females. Like women, many men found work in mills and factories, while others were electricians, plumbers, construction workers, and truck drivers. When families found it hard to make ends meet on one full-time salary, they tried to work in shifts so that one parent could be home with the children during the day and the other person could be home at night. Of course, this arrangement meant that husbands and wives saw little of each other during the week because they were so busy.

Deborah's parents, who met while working at a shoe factory, both kept their jobs after having children:

> Mom was a stitcher at the factory. My dad stayed home with me during the day. He worked the night shift -- the four to eleven -- so he could be with me in the morning and afternoons. He did the same kind of work Mom did. Then he became a floor man at the same company she was working at. Now he works the regular shift as an oil man. She's still stitching.

When I asked Deborah and other women like her about their parents' relationships in the home, most reported that their mothers and fathers had "okay" or "decent" marriages, but they did not know much about whether their parents were happy or not. "Those kinds of issues were not part of family discussions," one woman said. "I never knew that my mother thought she had made a mistake by marrying my father until years later after they divorced." Even when children were older there was little discussion of the good and bad times in their past or openness about thoughts and feelings. Another woman said,

"Mom and Dad never talked about important issues in front of us. They probably were afraid to... or they didn't have the time." While Komorovsky (1962) found that the couples with strong emotional ties were more likely to stay together in hard economic times, many of these couples seem to have a "working" relationship -- they were committed to raising their children together but they had little "personal fulfillment" with their marriages.

As children, women told me they were also uninformed about how their parents managed their household business. Most of what they learned about financial troubles or emotional crises was second-hand information. Some believed their parents talked about serious issues at night after the children were in bed, but others thought there had been little communication in their marriages. Many women told me that they stopped asking their parents questions because they never got satisfying answers. For the most part, mothers wanted their children to be protected from adult problems. Although they may have been concerned about problems having to do with alcohol or unemployment, they knew there was "no sense" making the whole family upset and worried by talking about them. It would just make matters worse. In a rural community where people knew each other, there was also a desire to maintain some semblance of privacy around the neighbors. One woman said,

> Money was always a big shhhh, you know, I suppose they didn't want you going broadcasting at school. Everything was hush, hush --- can't talk about that. Even still, [my mother] don't show me her bills. If I say something about the cost of my Public Service bills, she'll say, "mine's high too." She won't tell me.

Most of the women told me that they never went without basic needs as youngsters. In only a few cases, women remembered being hungry, homeless, or without heat in the winter when they were children. But most wore "hand-me-down" clothes from older siblings and cousins. In fact, this was so common that there was little or no stigma associated with sharing personal or household items. Struggling parents moved from apartment to apartment to save a little bit on the monthly rent.

Many of the women's parents met each other in high school or at work. They may have grown up in the same neighborhood or their families knew each other, like the couples in Gans' (1962) study. If they had obligations to help their own families, they spent a year or two engaged. About one quarter of the women's parents married because they were pregnant. Unlike today, the majority of these marriages lasted more than thirty years. Those women whose parents were older -- in their twenties or thirties -- when they married and began having children seemed to be doing better financially. Many had saved money as young single adults and bought homes once they married. Those parents who could, paid for everything with cash. One woman said about her parents, "They never liked the credit idea. Paying off bills was important to them." Sometimes it took longer for families to make costly furniture purchases, and dishwashers and other appliances malfunctioned and went unrepaired. Although Rubin (1976) found that men in working class families took care of the bills, the women in my sample reported that whoever had more education or "was the most mathematical" balanced the checkbook. One woman said, "My mother was cheap -- no, she was a good budgeter. She's the one who took care of all the money in the house."

Although most of the women I interviewed said they were not aware of "big" problems in the home, one-third of the women experienced their parents' divorce while they were under the age of sixteen. Most thought that their parents had had "bad" relationships for several years before conflict escalated and they finally split up. These divorces took a long time to become final, and often the mother and children moved temporarily to the grandparents' house while permanent arrangements were sorted out.

The women in my sample grew up in larger than average families: only one was an only child, 11 had one sibling, 25 came from families of three, and 13 had many siblings, from four siblings to families with eleven children. Some of the big families are blended families in which their mothers and fathers divorced and remarried, sharing households with step-parents and step-siblings at some point during their growing up years. More than half of these women's parents are still married today, one-third of their parents are divorced, and a few of their parents did not marry each other at all. (Of those, all but one of their mothers married other men shortly after having a child, the other woman's mother never legally married but lived with a partner for twenty years.)

When the study participants talk about the apartments, mobile homes, and houses where they grew up, they describe a crowded dwelling where they shared a bedroom with a sister or two. If they were one of the older siblings they moved out of the house as soon as they could afford it, longing for some privacy. If they were one of the younger siblings, they waited for the others to go so they could finally have their own space. If parents divorced, the configurations of their parents' households changed, and while the majority of the children stayed with their mothers, many spent a lot of time with fathers,

usually summers when they were in grade school or a year or two of high school. The reasons for the changes in place of residence were usually their own "preference" -- one woman told me that she wasn't getting along with her mother when she was thirteen, so she thought she would "try out" her father who had recently remarried. At first it was like a vacation -- he had more money to give her an allowance and did not expect her to hold a part-time job after school, but then she began to miss her mother. They resolved the problem by sharing physical custody between her mother and father. Since her parents lived close enough to each other that she did not have to switch schools, such an arrangement was possible. As a teenager, she liked "having two places to come home to." It gave her a chance to appreciate both of her parents; they made an effort to consult each other when making decisions affecting her life and she maintains a good relationship with them now. Most of the women in my sample grew up in northern New England, and in instances when their parents changed residences, they moved only a few miles from their last address.

Table 5. Family Background of Sample (N = 50)

	Number	Percentage
Parents' Marital Status		
Still married	28	56%
Ever divorced	17	34
Never married	5	10
Number of Siblings		
0-1	12	24
2-3	25	50
4+	13	26

After a divorce, the women in my sample who were the youngest children in the families were the "most sensitive" and "took things more personally" than their older siblings. Although most of the separations and divorces were due to persistent economic problems or unfaithful spouses, there were a few mothers who rebelled against the social expectations of being a wife and mother (see Seifer 1974). Following the strict gender roles of marriage was too stifling for some women. Elaine described the reason for her parents' divorce,

> Well, actually, the explanation [for their break-up] was because my father wanted my mother to stay home and be a homemaker and a housewife and be there when the kids got home from school. All the things that I wanted her to do, make cookies and be a lunch mother.... and she had a really strong desire to work. Which I didn't understand for a long time. Of course you never do. She was just a really bright woman and I think she was valedictorian of her high school. And the last thing she wanted to do was sit home and raise babies. So they had a very fundamental disagreement about having a family and what their roles should be.

After the divorce, Elaine and her sister lived with her mother and her brothers lived with her father. She rarely saw them during her teenage years (after the age of twelve) but now that she is an adult, they speak on the phone frequently and they visit each other at Easter and Christmas time.

Fifteen families experienced alcohol problems or domestic abuse. Many of the women's fathers spent long evenings at one of the local bars, however. Mothers "covered up" for their absence by keeping the children away or putting them to bed before their father came home. Like the women Rubin (1976) interviewed, these mothers went to great lengths to keep their families intact. As Linda put it, "When I was little I didn't really understand why he would sound funny when he came home, you know. Why was

this all happening, you know? Why was he angry? And stuff like that. Because you don't think about alcohol when you're a kid. You just don't understand what's happening." As teenagers, most had at least one confidant -- a sister, a brother, a step-sister, a step-brother, a half-sister or a half-brother -- with whom they discussed their worries and concerns about the family. Occasionally, some would disclose their family problems to school teachers, camp counselors, or nurses. Eleven women told me they had emotionally close relationships with someone outside the family whom they could ask for advice when they were adolescents. The majority, however, relied on their parents and grandparents for assurance and security all through their growing up years. With one or more caring (and working) adults to make life seem "safe" they felt their families were secure.

In this section, we have seen that working-class families in northern New England were much like those described in accounts from the 1960s and 1970s (Komarovsky 1962; Gans 1962; Rubin, 1976). The families who have made their living in this small manufacturing town have been practical, hard-working, and family-oriented. The women in my sample grew up in homes in which both parents held jobs, although their mothers tended to define themselves primarily as wives, not as workers. These families lived near relatives and knew their neighbors, and their spare time was spent near home. Their generation expected marriage to be for the long-term and these couples raised many children in their over-crowded homes. The marriages were not always happy, especially in hard economic times, but most parents stayed together because they believed it was the "right thing" for their children. Those who divorced or were abandoned (usually because

of alcoholism or abuse) remarried and tried to "start over" again. These families were careful with their money, and some were able to buy homes, cars and camps which they shared with their children, and later, with their grandchildren. This generation of working-class parents are expected to help their adult children when they have trouble "getting on their feet" as young workers and parents.

Schooling and Work Experiences

What was the school's role in preparing the working-class women in my sample for the future? By all accounts, the parochial and public schools in this working-class community were "good" for the average achiever but relatively few women received close, personal attention from teachers. Students were tracked into a technical, business or college-preparatory program based on their performance on standardized tests and personal preferences. Women in my sample reported that some teachers were very involved and concerned about particular students, while others were only focused on teaching and working the "bare minimum" and never reached out to students outside of the classroom. Several students mentioned school counselors who talked with them when they first went to junior high school and were concerned that their grades had dipped or they had become involved with a rough crowd. Some of the "unnoticed" students caused trouble and other simply withdrew from participation in after-school clubs, concerts, outings, and sports by middle school.

> The poorer children didn't want to be involved in activities at school. They did not have as many friends. I didn't want any because I didn't trust anybody. And I figured if they get close to you, you kind of have a threat.

In high school, students divided themselves into social and academic groupings, and the majority of the women I interviewed were in the "middle" group. Their grades were neither excellent nor miserable. Most, like Lori, did not take honors-level courses: "A lot of classes that I took were the basic ones. I never had algebra in high school, until I came to the [technical college], and now I find it hard with all the new math. All they offered back then was, like, general math one, general math two and business math." Another student said, "If you were there and you made an effort, a lot of times they'd pass you anyway, just to keep moving you along. Because, I mean, there's quite a few times I should have stayed back, but they just let you go anyway."

Family responsibilities increased as the women in my sample progressed from elementary school grades to high school. Almost everyone worked at jobs after school and on weekends. In addition to paid work, eight women took care of ill parents, aging grandparents, or younger siblings in the evenings. The demands of taking care of others made these teenagers more mature as young adults. Patti, for example, assumed responsibility when her mother was diagnosed with bone cancer:

> Q: Was there any time when things seemed especially hard growing up?
>
> A: Yep. When mom got cancer. When she took sick. Because dad was working out of town. Not living out of town, but he drove a truck away from home all week. And she got sick. I took over. I assumed the motherly role and tried to take care of her and her two children, my two younger brothers. I was 16 years old. She was sick for a year, then she passed away, and I had all of the responsibility.

Fourteen students in my sample left school in the junior high or high school grades (eight never returned after being suspended). Some of these girls found that the

middle-class "preppies" made fun of them as lower-status "losers." Frances recalls being harassed by other students on a daily basis. "They were teasing me about my funny-looking winter boots. I'd come home crying all the time. Saying I hate my life. I hate being in school." Her mother knew that she had "brains" and was smart enough to do the work, but she worried about her daughter. "She said, 'Honey, it's up to you. You know I'll have to talk with your father about it, but if you want out of that school, if you can go take your test and pass out of school, then I'll let you go.' She said, 'Because there's no need for you to go through that kind of pain and that kind of stress every single day.'" Frances and other women did not think that the school's principal tried hard to keep those "problem" children in school: "If you got into fights or something, instead of counseling them, they'd just say, you know, I think it would be better if you just left school because you're learning nothing here. And I just found that to be offensive. And if I was a parent, I'd be at the school asking them to explain that." Frances' own mother did not confront school authorities, but instead allowed the teachers to make the decisions that determined her educational opportunities and future life chances.

When I asked women about their sisters' and brothers' educational attainment, I learned there were family patterns. Entire families dropped out of school, one after the other. Sometimes only one child in a large family would make it all the way through school. Winnie's family is a good example:

> Let's see. Diane graduated high school, James dropped out, I dropped out, Peter went in the Navy, David graduated but it took him an extra year, Beth dropped out. I don't remember if Kim graduated high school or not. I believe Bill dropped out of school. So, you're probably looking at two out of eight. I dropped out of school in my 10th year. Well, I kind of got

kicked out. I got caught cutting school and drinking on the football field. And I stayed out.

The technical college in the town offered an opportunity for women who left high school early but still hoped to go to college later. Some took the GED exam and passed easily, and their welfare workers and teachers gave them information about additional training courses, often pointing them in the direction of adult education programs. They enrolled in continuing education courses, but in classes with people at different levels of learning, they often found they lagged behind.

Overall, the women in my study are a relatively well educated group. Eighteen percent have completed a two-year or four-year college degree. Only a few of these women entered a full-time college program immediately after high school. Most found jobs and went to school at night or part-time during the day while working and taking the time to decide what they wanted to do. Ten of the 50 women "expected" to go to college, but the others planned to work first and save some money.

Table 6. School Attainment of Sample (N = 50)

	Number	Percentage
Highest Grade		
B. A.	4	8%
A. A.	5	10
Some college	21	42
High school only	10	20
GED or less	10	20

These women paid tuition themselves with their own savings from work, Pell Grants, Federal Guaranteed Student Loans, and work/study funds. A few borrowed

money from older relatives "who could spare the money" and small inheritances from grandparents. Most of those from large families became financially emancipated form their parents so that they did not drain their parents' bank account "just in order to go to college."

Over 40 percent of women in the sample have had some college courses or have enrolled in some type of post-high school training program. These are women who took a course or two in a specific training program as a nursing assistant or a computer technician. Others are hoping to continue their studies at four year institutions after graduating from the local community college.

Surprisingly, only a few were worried that they would not be able to pay for college. One woman said, "There are so many grants available now, my grades are pretty good so I'll find something. If I want to go, nothing will stop me." Twenty percent of the women in my sample finished high school, either in the regular program or in the vocational-technical school. Some told me they did not like being in school, and despite admitting that "you need an education to get anywhere these days" they would much rather work than "waste time studying." The remaining 20 percent have passed the GED examination or dropped out of school and never went back. Some who are enrolled in adult literacy programs are reading at a fifth or sixth grade level but still want to pass their "equivalency" so that they can enroll in the technical college, and others are fulfilling a requirement in order to continue receiving public assistance, and if they are not ready to learn, they are less likely to be making steady progress in their educational

program. Both groups of women describe receiving emotional support from their classmates and teachers in continuing education programs and at the technical college.

The women in my sample have educational opportunities to prepare them for future work. Some women had family problems or responsibilities that kept them out of school and some dropped out because of peer pressures. The women who stayed in school and graduated from the technical college appear to find good jobs in the area. Even more than their parents, these women find it hard to support the household with one working adult.

In the 1970s and 1980s the most popular college courses were geared towards drafting and machinery (men's jobs); by now the highest enrollments are in nursing, child care, and office technology. Job training programs have encouraged women to study traditionally "male" subjects, such as science, computers, and math. By 1990, the employment gap between men and women in this county had closed considerably with 66 percent of men and 53 percent of women employed. Professional programs have helped women learn to be independent, gain new skills, and exchange information with others in their own communities. Vanessa first imagined herself as a nurse's aide, and found work with no trouble. More recently, she finished college, earning an associates degree and a bigger paycheck.

> I was a Certified Nursing Assistant. I was doing that for four years. I made $8.00 an hour with full time benefits. Excellent benefits. When I went back to school to become a nurse, I knew that a Registered Nurse makes $12.00 an hour in the first year. That's with only two years more of school.

All the women in my sample have worked for pay, and 70 percent are currently employed. Typical types of jobs they have held are grocery store cashier, department store clerk, housecleaner, amusement park attendant, fast food worker, and hotel chambermaid. Most of the time they found these jobs through word of mouth -- a friend recommended them to their manager -- or through recruitment at the high school before the start of summer season.

In addition to earning a degree, being part of a family with a strong reputation as hard workers is an asset, whether one is male or female. Women report their families helped them find steady employment by using their own connections to bosses. Moreover, they helped them to keep their jobs by encouraging them to make work a priority and reminding them "to get to work on time, to dress neat, and to be friendly to everyone." Their mothers and fathers also served as good role models when they entered the labor force, demonstrating by example how to balance work and family responsibilities.

Whether their job is after-school or to support a family, women work for the same reasons as men -- to make money. Having autonomy in one's job, competent coworkers, a fair boss and flexible hours are also desirable. Many women in this study find their work is poorly paid, strenuous, and unsatisfying. While most say they would move for a good job, they also worry they would miss living near their families and hope they never have to make that decision. Those with unusual talents and an entrepreneurial spirit have been able to build their own businesses. For example, Marty sets up computers for

people in her neighborhood. She believes that she has more options than her mother did, and expresses optimism about the rewards of work:

> There are more opportunities, for me, you know. I have always been one that, I can talk to a stop sign, argue with it all day long and win. My mother will not talk to anybody. She'd cross the street to avoid somebody, because she's afraid that somebody is going to look at her wrong. I don't believe that. If I don't get out there and do anything, it ain't going to get done. I'm not going to have anything. So I make my own work -- fixing computers. But I've also painted houses and catered parties for people. I'll do anything. It took my mother a long time to figure out what she could be happy doing, and it was long after the kids were out of the house. I always wanted to be out and involved in life.

Some women dream of leaving their home town for a more exciting life in another state, usually in a warmer climate. After graduating from high school, they decided to enroll in the military themselves or run away with a girlfriend or boyfriend to an exotic location. It sounded like an exciting life to women who otherwise expected to be working in a factory. Rose broke off her engagement at eighteen and signed up for the Navy instead:

> I was stationed in Florida. That was my escape. I needed to get away. Tough place to be stationed, huh? After I got out of basic training, I was placed right there. I was a torpedoes mate and built torpedoes. My dream was to get to Japan. I had seen so many beautiful pictures of it.

The decisions that women make about school and work are tied to their real and imagined opportunities. Parents are often role models who encourage and motivate their daughters to work hard and succeed as students, workers, and mothers. The men in women's lives -- their children's fathers and boyfriends -- also shape the decisions and choices that women make about childbearing and marriage.

Men, Marriage, and Relationships

In the 1960s, there was little confusion about norms surrounding courtship and marriage. Dating was supervised by families, and most people agreed that sex should occur inside marriage. Out-of-wedlock pregnancies, when they did happen, were an embarrassment to the family, a problem to be solved (Rubin 1976). Marriage legitimated the child and brought respect back to the families. Although some working-class families still adhere to these traditional ideas, others have created new coping strategies as single parenthood has become more common in our society. Women have gained economic independence and political power over the past thirty years, and with the support of families and friends, new possibilities emerge for parenting children successfully in mother-only households.

Small towns, however, continue to reflect more conservative family-based values. Compared to other women their age living in the United States, the women in my sample were older when they first became sexually active.[1] About one-half first had had sexual intercourse when they were between the ages of sixteen and eighteen. Over one-third were under sixteen when they first had sex and 10 percent were over 18 years old. Although some of their mothers and sisters took them to the local health clinic to get a prescription for the pill after they started menstruating, only a few used birth control the first time they had sex. Most women told me they waited until they either knew someone who got pregnant, or, started steadily dating a boyfriend before buying condoms or using

[1] Several women told me they had been molested as children. They described sexual assault as "unwilling" sex. When I write about their early sexual experiences, I am writing about their reports of first "willing" activities and intercourse.

the pill.[2] Despite the haphazard use of birth control, relatively few of these women became pregnant as young teenagers. More than half were older than eighteen when they first got pregnant. Five of the 50 women told me they had traveled long distances to have abortions in their early stages of pregnancy before anyone found out.

Table 7. Sex and Pregnancy of Sample (N = 50)

	Number	Percentage
Age First Had Intercourse		
Under 16	19	38%
16-18	26	52
Over 18	5	10
Age First Pregnant		
Under 16	2	4
16-18	21	42
Over 18	27	54
Child Conceived Out of Wedlock?		
Yes	37	74
No	13	26

The women in my study began dating men older than themselves in high school, and they became serious with these boyfriends when they were still young, either getting engaged or "moving in together" early in the relationship. Jenny explained why she and her boyfriend wanted to cohabit before committing to each other: "I would like us to move in and see if we can live together first. I don't want to get married and then live together and find out that we can't adjust to each other." When these trial relationships ended they often moved home again temporarily while they recovered from the breakup

[2] Now the method of choice is the Depo-Provera "patch" which is inserted in the body for five years and requires no additional pill or barrier.

and began new relationships. Lillian Rubin (1976, 1994) argues that working class families marry for love, sometimes at young ages in order to escape problems in their parents' home. Rayna Rapp (1992) also writes that the working class tend to describe their attraction for men as love, not money, and says they continue to depend on extended families and other networks for both emotional and economic support.

As young adults, most of the women I met moved back and forth between relying on a man and relying on Mom and Dad for support. But this system of early adult "dependence" worked because they paid rent to their mothers and fathers, and contributed to the household while they lived there. They also saved money; it was cheaper than renting a studio apartment, and it helped out their parents. According to several women, the hardest part of living at home as a young adult was negotiating the "ground rules." Agnes said,

> My parents own the whole building. They have the downstairs to themselves and this is a three-bedroom apartment. My sisters and I, we moved up here because it became vacant and my parents weren't renting it out. They said, well, why don't you just go up there for now. It's been two years and they like knowing where we are all the time, which is hard. I did pay rent for a while. Right now, I don't. It's just more convenient than having my own place. In the spring, my sister and I are going to go halves and pay the heating fuel. We share a kitchen and eat together. We pitch in with my parents whenever they need a little.

Although she uses the word "convenient", Agnes actually means cheap. Her parents continued to give their opinions -- welcome or unwelcome -- about boyfriends, friends, and other matters she preferred to keep private. Entertaining male visitors is the hardest part of the bargain, so she would like to find her own place next year.

These poor and working-class women separate decisions about childbearing from decisions about marriage and work in ways that were not common, nor possible, a generation ago. Many more women are delaying marriage in order to have the freedom to attend college and to work. But, nonetheless they are sexually active. If women and their partners are not using reliable birth control, the potential for pregnancy -- in adolescence or early adulthood -- is high. Only nine of the women I interviewed married when they learned they were pregnant; the others remained single, in the legal sense, at least. Those who were already engaged, moved up the wedding date. A few women were forced into marriage by their parents who told them "it was the right thing to do." The others, as we shall see, continued to live at home or found their own apartment, depending on their age and whether or not they needed public assistance.

Linda, for example, says she was very naive as an 18 year old pregnant single woman. She knew how to have sex, but she had no idea how be a parent. Her body was changing and she was scared about giving birth. She hoped to be 30 when she first became a mom -- "be married, have an education, have a house first." Linda and her friends' lives diverged at the end of high school -- they were purchasing prom dresses and she was buying diapers. She described the moment when she realized that she had grown up: "My girlfriends came from school to visit me in the hospital and said 'Escape out of here, give the kid to the nurse, and come with us to Senior Skip Day.' And I'm, like, 'Sorry, I think that part of my life is over forever.' I'm, like, 'I have to raise a kid now, have to be Mommy'."

Having a child was a turning point in the lives of most of the women in this study. It helped them make a transition to adulthood, to see themselves as responsible for another person, and abruptly halted the wild drinking and carefree partying that made up their teenage years. As Wendy said:

> I think I grew up a lot when I became a mother. It kind of saved my life 'cause I was on the wrong track. I think I look back and I think, 'Hey, you were lucky that you had to make a choice and, you know, this is the choice that you made and you're happy with it. I guess that's the biggest blessing of all -- that I'm happy with the decisions that I've made as a parent and as a mother.

Although many were pleased to be independent from their parents, others were not anxious to leave their home. Sometimes their mothers were not in the position to help, or thought that it was best for them to move into a separate space. Raising another child just as they were approaching their forties or fifties themselves was not their idea. Baby carriages and children's toys had been replaced by summer camps and golf clubs. Deborah, who has her own apartment a few miles from her parents' house said:

> When I was eighteen, I didn't really want to move out but my mother couldn't support me and my baby. Now she's three and there's lots of times, you know, like at Christmas time, I'd rather just be living home with them than being out on my own, all alone. It's been hard.

Getting up in the morning and getting her son dressed is a chore that she faces alone. The day seems long, and she does not have a chance to be still by herself unless she wakes very early or stays up late into the night.

The women in my sample have smaller families than their own parents did. Forty-two percent (21 women) have only one child. Thirty-four percent (17 women) have

two children. Twenty percent (10 women) have three children. One woman has four children and one has five. About half of the women in my sample had their first child out-of wedlock, and some have had more children -- some inside and others outside of wedlock. One topic they all seem to agree about is how their lives have changed since becoming a parent:

> I'm not the center anymore. They are. They need things. They need me. They need supervision. They need love. They need companionship. They need so much that I know I'm worth, you know, more than what I thought before.

Despite the difficulties, raising children as a single parent brings the same kinds of emotional rewards that married parents enjoy. As Marty put it:

> They're fun. And they're fun-ny. I consider my kids my friends. They always have something to ask me or they make a cheery comment when I'm down. Like the other day, my middle son told me, 'That cold air makes my feet giggle.' So, you know, something new is always happening. It's interesting. It keeps the day moving along.

Mothers with two or more children at home told me that the hours before the school bus arrives usually consist of arguments about "what shirt matches which pair of slacks" or "who is going to use this spoon or that bowl." Having another person's life to consider changes the consequences of one's life choices. Another woman said, "If I were on my own, I'd be able to do a lot more playing around. I could have whatever job I wanted and not really be trying to make plans for the future. You know, I wouldn't be here [at college]. I wouldn't be trying to make something more of myself."

People in the community sometimes do not understand how they can be helpful to single parents: "I think the hardest thing is trying to defend myself for the way I raised

my kids," Catha said, after complaining that she gets called to school about her daughter's disruptive behavior in the classroom. Even the teacher admits that her daughter's distraction is mostly because of boredom: "She's as smart as a whip. I need to keep her entertained constantly or she fiddles." Catha worries that some teachers make quick judgements about, or react differently to, children who are from single parent households. "They shouldn't. Kids are just kids," she says.

Becoming a parent also changes the relationship between the daughter and mother. Most women feel closer to their mothers and fathers and some become more reflective about the way they were raised. They also have a lot of questions for their parents about the "nuts and bolts" of what to do with a sick or hungry young child. Jenny said,

> Nobody learns to be a parent, you just have to do it. When I first started I felt overwhelmed. I didn't know what to do, but my mother was there and I could pretty much make my own decisions. If I thought there was something wrong with her, I would call my mother first thing. And she would bolt right over here.

The separation of marriage and motherhood has long been identified with the experiences of poor black women (Stack 1974; Furstenburg 1976; Dill 1992; Stack and Burton 1994). But these white working-class women's opinions about marriage are shaped by their assessment of their family relationships too. Those who grew up in divorced households express anxiety about "following down the same path" as their own parents. Faith said,

> I have a really bad opinion about marriage, I really do. It's like our whole family is divorced. My mom has been married. This is my mom's fourth or fifth marriage. The man she's married to now, they have a great relationship I think, I mean they bicker and whatever like normal couples,

> but they started out as friends before they were married, which I think was smart. If I ever got married I could never get divorced cause I couldn't feel like I failed at something. That would kill me. I wouldn't want to, you know, have a man and all of a sudden have him gone. I would lose my mind probably.

All the women I interviewed -- whether they had been married or not -- insist that legal marriage is not necessary for having a well-adjusted child and a secure family. Regardless of whether their own parents had stayed married or divorced, these women are often skeptical about the benefits of legal marriage. Ginny said,

> I think it's awful, but people don't put a lot of thought into getting married. They think it's just something that society expects them to do when they've been with someone for so long, rather than a commitment. Then they find out three years down the road there's a big problem, and you know, it don't last. If I thought people would work harder at a relationship because they were married, I'd be more for it. But, they don't. If things don't go right, they have a bad day and they get divorce. They don't exhaust every option to make it work.

Most believe, however, that marriages can work. They point to parents, neighbors and friends whose marital relationships serve as models. If only they could find "a good man," they would like to marry, buy a home and maybe have another child. As a single mother, their definition of "a good man" includes someone willing to accept the responsibilities of parenthood if they decide to become husband and wife. Beyond that, women are looking for men who can hold on to a job, who have a work ethic and a moral code, men who don't drink too much and who are not violent. They are not willing to settle for just anyone. Faith said,

> I think marriage is important. I wouldn't rule it out if the right person came along and there was some compassion and, you know, we kind of get some guidelines about what to expect from each other, then it would be okay. But my daughter would have to approve of him first!

The choices that working-class women are making today to remain single reflect a realistic compromise between the values of their childhood and the greater economic and social resources available to them through their own networks. In a recent study of the status of children and youth, Succeeding Generations, Havemann and Wolfe suggest changing family circumstances and behaviors may be the result of new economic pressures on young adults:

> Young families have not experienced the economic gains that were taken as "natural" by their parents, and their hopes for home ownership, vacations, and college education for their children were more uncertain than expected. Wives increased their work time in part to enable families to attain the economic gains on which even modest dreams are built (Havemann and Wolfe 1994: 261).

Knowing from their own childhood that two parents do not guarantee an easier time, these women are making different arrangements. While they still have high expectations for themselves and their children, they value their freedom and independence. Some of their children's fathers are living in their household or if they are elsewhere they are still involved with child-raising. Close friends might live next door and they share more than cups of sugar -- they borrow cars, clothes, and school supplies from each other. In addition to parents and other relatives, community programs play a crucial role in assisting single mothers who are trying to support themselves and their children. Parents can help their adult children make decisions to return to school or to seek employment, but only when there are resources in the community that make it possible for women to take steps towards self-sufficiency.

This chapter has described the rural working-class families of women in my study. With few exceptions, their parents adhered to the traditional gender roles of the nuclear family model, and some of them did well. But their daughters grew up with different experiences and expectations and they are forming their own choices and decisions about work, motherhood, and marriage. What resources prepare them for children and work? The next chapter introduces three case studies to illustrate three groups of single mothers with different kinds and amounts of resources. In Chapters VI and VII I describe in detail how the women in each group progressed through childhood and adolescence and I explain how they use different kinds and amounts of resources to cope with single motherhood.

CHAPTER V

THREE WOMEN'S RESOURCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

What are resources? What kinds of relationships provide them? This chapter examines how security, opportunities, and investments from family and community at different stages in women's lives influence their decision to raise children "on their own" and their ability to manage work, school, and home commitments. The women in my sample are either divorced, separated or they have never married. Despite their legal status as single parents, few of these mothers describe themselves as raising children alone, regardless of their marital status or income situation. Recent statistics show that 88 percent of single-parent households are headed by mothers and the majority of these mothers are adults, not teenagers. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) point out that these families are at high risk for poverty, while Edin and Lein (1997) reminds us that poor women must often find ways to supplement their welfare check with unreported income because they have too little to make ends meet.

Certainly some mother-only households are managing better than others, and the ones who seem most secure are those who are able to earn wages themselves as well as tap into a ready supply of help from a variety of sources. Women who grew up in higher-income families generally are better off in the households they create. Economic security is an important part of what parents and their children need because it provides a safety net during a temporary money crisis. Women also need mothers, sisters, friends and

neighbors to turn to for baby-sitting and a patient ear and a nod when they need to discuss problems. Emotional support is also necessary. Without someone to turn to, they tell me it can be hard to get through the day.

To answer my research questions, I identified subgroups among the 50 single mothers in terms of the economic, social and personal resources they currently possess, and compared them in terms of family and background factors in earlier life stages in order to gain insight into how women accumulate resources over the life course. I created three conceptual categories to capture the variation among single mother families: strong, struggling, and transitional (see Chapter III). Then, I tracked and organized other events and experiences that characterized each category using a life course framework. As Figure 5 suggests, women with similar coping outcomes also shared common circumstances during their childhood and adolescence.

Figure 5. Resources Over the Life Course

Childhood	Adolescence	Early Adulthood	Outcome
security	security involvement supervision	security opportunity independence	= **Strong** (N=20)
insecurity	opportunity mentoring achievement	security opportunity independence	= **Transitional** (N=15)
insecurity	insecurity burden detachment	insecurity strain dependence	= **Struggling** (N=15)

Women heading strong families are those whose parents, stepparents, or guardians had stable relationships and steady employment histories and provided for them well.

Moreover, these women's own school and early work experiences were promising, their relatives and neighbors watched out for them during adolescence. They also took advantage of early work opportunities as young adults. Now, as single mothers, they are likely to be supporting themselves with earned income, or acquiring additional education and skills so they can take better care of their children. These 20 "strong" mother-headed families benefit, first and foremost, from resources they find inside their own families -- baby-sitting, small loans, spare clothing, an extra car -- before tapping into resources outside their families. They also have other places to go for assistance -- their partners and neighbors are able and willing to share and pool what they have.

Women heading struggling families have not had access to resources inside or outside of their families. They grew up in families characterized by difficult relationships with parents, and weak ties to other relatives and adults. Many in this group dropped out of school because they were distracted, disruptive, or unable to pass their courses. Their family and school problems were compounded by having few opportunities as adolescents and young adults. The 15 "struggling" mothers became dependent on public assistance and friends (who are also hard-pressed like themselves) for financial and social support.

The transitional women, like the struggling women, had unsteady childhoods, but role models from their schools and neighborhoods offset their lack of family resources. These helpful adults intervened at important crossroads in the women's lives, often guiding them through difficult decisions. Once they were ready, these women found people in their communities were there to assist, and opportunities were open to them.

More than family, close friendship networks and knowledge of public agencies and institutions were important for helping these 15 women.

In the following pages I identify what social and economic resources are, and I describe how they change over the course of three women's lives. These representative cases -- a strong, a struggling and a transitional mother -- show the various ways women experience single motherhood, and explains which social factors affect their prospects for success. Who helps? Who gets help? Under what conditions?

A "Strong" Mother from a Resource-Rich Family

I met Maura at the Technical College on the first day I started my field work. She was sitting in the cafeteria taking a break between classes, and watching the children from the child care center play outside the window. Now in her late thirties, Maura grew up in northern New England with both parents and two younger siblings. Over the next couple of hours, she told me about her family.

Figure 6. The Pattern of Maura's Life Experiences

Childhood	Adolescence	Early Adulthood	Present Time
Parents married	Mother set the rules	College-bound	Studying towards college degree
Mother stayed at home until children began school	Received attention from parents and teachers	Pregnancy and abortion	Father and sister are nearby
Father was self-employed	Worked part-time at recreational program	Moved out of parents' home	Large network of friends and neighbors
Parents lived in town all their lives	Involved in sports and activities	Marriage and divorce	No partner

Maura's parents met more than 40 years ago and started a family when they were both in their early twenties. Although her parents have mostly stayed in the area since she was young, Maura has moved back and forth from New Hampshire to Maine to Massachusetts several times since finishing high school. Maura's mother stayed at home with their children for several years before returning to school for a few courses and eventually taking a job as a guidance counselor: "When we were very little, she was home. When I started Kindergarten or first grade, I remember her starting to work part-time at that point and then full-time, when we were in school." Maura's father had his own produce business when the children were young. Later, he bought a car dealership. "He didn't graduate from high school. He was self-made." Both of Maura's siblings are still living in the area near her parents. Her brother married about 15 years ago and bought a home for himself, his wife and their four children near the mill where he works. Although Maura's sister relocated a number of times following boyfriends and husbands, she moved home "for good" about the same time as Maura. She is now married and has two young children.

Maura remembers that her parents worried about money, especially when her father changed careers, but they never discussed it with the children. They always seemed to have enough and they lived in a one-family house owned by her parents. Her mother set the rules, since her father was usually tired after work: "My father would come home from work. He'd have his cocktail at night and my mother was more of the disciplinarian, the one that usually carted us around to our friends' houses." They would

go to camp in the summer and sledding and skiing with her mother and father on winter weekends. As she says, it was a "pretty traditional childhood."

While she liked elementary school, Maura found the first year of high school difficult. She was a shy adolescent and needed some extra attention from her parents and teachers. She made friends, and as a junior, she became more outgoing: "I was a cheerleader, on the ski team and things like that. I was in the clubs and became sort of popular. I had fairly high grades when I graduated and a lot of friends." In the summers, she worked at the dairy bar, and during the winters she worked on alternate weekends for a White Mountain hiking and ski club. As she started to develop a social life, she found that her parents were becoming more restrictive: "At one point, I did run away to the neighbor's house for a couple of nights, but it was basically to get a little bit more freedom. My mother was very strict and I just wanted to do some other things -- and I did." In retrospect, Maura says that her mother had a good sense about dangers, and was wary about letting her stay over her friends' houses when there was no supervision: "Knowing some of the things that I found out as an adult, I thank God that I had a safe haven and things weren't abusive or there wasn't a lot of screaming. My mother would be uptight sometimes with the three of us, but I was very fortunate."

Maura started having sex with her boyfriend when she was a senior in high school. She was not using any birth control and found herself pregnant at seventeen. She was frightened and asked an older woman friend in her neighborhood for advice who immediately contacted her parents: "It was a horrendous experience and I very rarely talk about it. It's just, it's something that I've kind of blocked, in fact, I've never even

thought about it for years." After much discussion, her parents took her to have an abortion in another state. She broke up with her boyfriend. They never mentioned the pregnancy or the abortion after returning from the trip.

Maura moved out of her parents' home after graduating from high school and found her own apartment: "Basically, just to have a place to hang out, just to do some things not under the watchful eye of a parent." She wanted to take some time off and have fun with her friends before going to college and deciding about a career: "I knew that I was going to college, but I didn't know when. I was just ready to do some exploring." She found a full-time office job that paid well enough to support herself. While she was living on her own and dating casually, Maura got pregnant for the second time. This time was also an accident but she had "completely different" views about being pregnant and she "definitely wanted to keep the baby." She saw herself as an adult with her own apartment and income, which meant she was more independent from her parents.

Maura's parents were surprised and disappointed because they wanted her to go to college -- but eventually they were supportive, and helped care for their new grandchild: "They absolutely adored him. He was the only grandchild for like eight or nine years. I think they just needed to accept that I made my own decisions and choices. Then, I think that we were living in two different places, maybe gave them that distance we needed." Maura's parents still insisted that she enroll in college, and they baby-sat and loaned her money to help her along as a single parent.

Maura loves being a mother: "If you like to observe and you like to watch, you learn a lot about children. Somebody said to me recently, you know, 'You almost look six, sitting there, watching.' I said, 'I love to watch children. I love to see how they react to things.' For me it really makes me stand back and reflect on who you are. You know, what kind of person are you and I don't know, they make you take a good, long look at yourself." Maura now has two other children: "Finances, for me, right now, are difficult. I always want to make sure that they're safe and the older my daughter gets, in second grade, she's into, you know, those little social glitches, and I like watching them, perhaps, dig their way through their hurdles. It's hard to stand back, as a parent and let them do it. I guess that's the only hard thing."

Maura has had several long-term romantic relationships as an adult. She lived with a boyfriend for about five years, but the relationship ended because she was more interested in being serious than he was: "I was thinking, you know, down the line I'd really like to have more children in a marriage." Her boyfriend, however, definitely did not want more children: "He had one son and he really didn't understand about being a father to him, you know, so how could I expect him to be a parent to my son? So we kind of ended it and I decided it was time to leave, now or never."

Several years later, she met another man and they were seriously dating for four years when she got pregnant. This time she wanted to get married. "I guess I was more worried about the financial thing, about raising another child, financially, because my son's father did not pay support, so we did get married. I don't think he wanted to any more than I did. And, about four days after we got married, I lost that baby, so, you

know, it was just -- and that was a tough thing for me." If it was also tough for him, Maura says, she did not know it: "He lacks a lot of emotion, any type of emotional response, you just don't get. So, they removed the baby and it took a couple weeks to get back on my feet, or whatever. It took a long time for me to get through that because first it was the physical aspects of it and then it was, you know, the psychological aspects of the whole thing."

Maura and her husband never actually discussed having another child. She suspected that he did not want the child but she did: "I definitely did. I wanted another baby. I had kind of made up my mind that he was not going to participate in certain aspects of our lives but I was going to go ahead and do them anyway." She decided to take some real estate classes and become licensed so she could get a better job. After recovering from her miscarriage, Maura started working again and took some time to re-evaluate her relationship. Her husband's drinking problem was getting worse and she was worried. She asked for a divorce: "He's an alcoholic, so he came home one night and he said, 'I'm not going to drink anymore' and he emptied out all his beer. He said, you know, 'If you just stay, I promise I won't drink anymore.' And I knew what that meant, but I told him that, I said, 'You can't empty the world. You can empty them today but they're always going to be there.' So he did stop drinking but he never went to AA. He stopped drinking in front of me, I guess. And, but the signs of the alcoholic were still there. He was still an alcoholic and through the next couple of years, he kind of drifted right back into that behavior, whether he was really drinking or not and I really, honestly, can't say if he was or he wasn't. He told me he wasn't. When I look back, the pattern of

behavior ended up, he might as well have been drinking. It ended up the same. I've done some reading on it, so I kind of understand it."

When her marriage grew more difficult, Maura divorced her husband and moved closer to home. She missed her mother and her sister, and needed their support as she went through divorce proceedings. Although she says she is not ruling out marriage in the future, she says, "I joke about it a lot with my friends, that it will never happen again, because this has taken me two years of constant court dates and I don't have a lawyer and he has two, so I might sound a little tired about it but I don't mean to be. I wouldn't rule it out if the right person came along and there was some compassion and, you know, we kind of get some different guidelines, I would think about it."

Like many of the women I interviewed, Maura considers "a good man" one who participates in family life -- someone who communicates and cares about the kids: "I think marriage should be a mutual thing. I think they should be able to discuss it and, if somebody is much better with financing the books, balancing the checkbook or whatever, maybe they could be delegated to take over that. If somebody else is much better at communicating with the insurance companies or whatever, you know, but this is something that they need to sit down and discuss or come to terms with. Yeah, being there with the kids and working and knowing when to give a hundred percent, if needed or backing off when needed or just kind of working together to make it work, make it flow. That's a marriage."

Maura's life story shows the fluidity of her family arrangements over the years. With her parents' support, she terminated a pregnancy when she was a teenager. She

used birth control only intermittently, and interestingly, when she was seriously dating someone she would go on the pill, but when she was dating casually she often would not use birth control and not be as careful. After high school, she became pregnant again and this time felt a strong desire to mother, although the child's father was not involved in the child's life. After having her first child, she began a long search for a partner and lived with a couple of serious boyfriends but did not marry until she became pregnant again. However, in this case, her "rush" into marriage was a mistake, she says, because she was thinking about financial security rather than emotional security at the time.

She thinks her ex-husband's notions of being married were quite different from her own. As she put it, "I don't think he stopped to realize that I had raised my son alone and, you know, we were okay, but he was very controlling and, I suppose, coming from a different background, where he thought everything was his, we did not share a checkbook. I did not ever see what he made. He had complete control and I guess that was fine for me because, at the time I worked and money was not an issue. It became an issue, when I wasn't able to work." They had arranged a system in which each paid for half of everything, regardless of what each other was making, when they lived together. Maura didn't know how much money he made, but he knew her salary. Her husband did not like to follow a budget and resisted telling her what he bought and spent on a regular basis. This arrangement worked out until they got married and she wasn't able to work because of her miscarriage: "I finally said to him, one day, because an older women in the office called me into a little meeting one time and said, What in hell is up with you? He is making a thousand dollars a week. He should be paying the bills. Why are you

worried?" Maura describes that conversation as a breakthrough because she never thought of a relationship that way. She took all the responsibility on herself. Since he moved in with her, she continued paying the housing costs. "He thought he was being a big sport by, you know, paying a little bit of groceries or whatever so when we split the bills it seemed like a good deal. I didn't think of the concept of joint property and responsibility. It was fifty-fifty but not really because he was making a lot more than I ever did."

When Maura considers what she would like from a marriage in the future, she looks back on her parents relationships and her own and sees problems with both the strict gender roles of her parents' generation and the equality-based roles she was trying to establish: "I don't think either the husband or the wife should be held the most responsible for that. I think it depends on what's going on in their lives, what they have for education, what they actually hold for a job, at the time and what they, you know, what they're able to contribute. I've been the one that's usually done the child raising, but I've also always earned money." She thinks both parents should want to participate: "If there's only one parent that really wants to see to those biological, or social, the physical needs of a child and the other parent's just letting it go because they either don't understand it or they don't want to understand it, there's a problem." Ideally, both parents are interested in helping their children. "Disciplining is teaching, so they should both be responsible for teaching their child."

Maura now lives with her oldest son and her two young daughters: "I moved to Maine for about twelve years and I came back a couple years ago because I'm getting a

divorce and it was nice to be able to come home. When I was twenty, I had my first son. I was not married. Then, I did take some college classes. I enrolled in school here and went about two semesters. I didn't quite finish the second semester and I ended up taking some classes in optometry . This is my second year at the Tech. I will graduate next year. I would like to teach kindergarten. That's what my goal is. I'm interested in kind of channeling the issues, maybe abuse and neglect, you know, other issues that might -- might be able to pinpoint to help them out with some problems in the future working in the elementary school age level."

Although her parents divorced and her mother recently moved to Florida, she sees them both often: "She has a camp right near by, so we see each other. My dad takes care of the children. Oh, and my older son is wonderful. He's out now, but he helps me every Wednesday, he has to help, but he's always been there to help. He's been more of the father. It's unfortunate but he had to take on that role, as a thirteen and fourteen year old and I look back and I think I wish he hadn't taken so much responsibility, but it wasn't forced either. He just anticipated the needs and he did help out."

Her father lives three houses down, with her aunt. She also has other friends in the neighborhood and sees people on a regular basis: "We have tea every night and it's a nice support." These are people who have known Maura for years and also knew her parents. She has a single friend with a young daughter: "We garden together and share the back yard. It's just nice." When Maura reflects on the things what helps people get ahead in life, she says: "Communicating is important for bringing them up right, loving them, making them feel secure, you know, so that they know they're safe, they're secure

and that they can do anything they want to do." She did not always feel so optimistic. "If you had asked me ten years ago, my idea of security definitely would have been money, definitely, but today, I have no money." The truth is that although Maura's income is low, she is gaining skills for the workplace and investing in herself. She is on her way to financial security again. Her life experience has taught her that she can earn money and support herself. She has grown cautious about what to expect from relationships, but is open to meeting someone in the future. For now, she is content with her routine: "When I come home at night, what's there is still going to be there, you know, and the atmosphere is basically going to be the same. I know that we have a ritual that, when we come home, we empty our knapsacks out, put our papers out, we all participate with supper and we read all our papers and we have our book at night. It just flows, you know, it's secure, it's comfortable, it flows."

A "Struggling" Mother from a Resource-Poor Family

On the day I visited the Head Start center to interview one of the mothers whose children attend the school, I watched the boys and girls bundle up in their snow gear and prepare themselves for a tobogganing field trip. Shortly after the children left the building for their outing, Penelope walked into the center dressed in jeans and a sweater and I introduced myself. Since we had nowhere else to go, we sat in child-size chairs and started to talk. For the first few minutes, Penelope was skeptical and nervous about being interviewed, and when I asked her why she said, "I just need to get a feel for it." As the conversation continued, she began to speak easily and relaxed her shoulders and sat back in her chair. She told me that she grew up in northern Massachusetts, near the New

Hampshire border. Her biological father was disabled and died when she was about 5 years old. Her mother brought up three children by herself and then remarried. As Penelope says, she "never knew the meaning" of the word welfare. Her mother worked full-time as a hand-sewer at a factory doing piece work. "She worked her fingers to the bone. Literally. Then she remarried when I was about thirteen. Things got a little easier."

Figure 7. The Patterns of Penelope's Life Experiences

Childhood	Adolescence	Early Adulthood	Present Time
Mother was widowed and later remarried	Received little attention from parents and teachers	Ran away from home with boyfriend	Not sure about future work or schooling; welfare
Mother was sole provider	Few rules; no curfew	Volatile relationships	No relatives are nearby
Moved several times while growing up	Worked part-time at factory	Sporadic work	Small network of friends and neighbors
	Uninvolved in school and activities		No partner

Penelope apologized for knowing only sketchy information about her family history. "I don't know much about my father. It was just so taboo to talk about these things. Especially after my mother got remarried." Her mother worked hard, and Penelope described her as the kind of person a mother *should* be: "She doesn't drink, she doesn't smoke, she doesn't swear, she's very much old-fashioned, I guess, for lack of better words." But Penelope didn't have a close open friendship with her mother or her sister because there were many unspeakable topics in her house. "She just liked to keep

things in the family. No talking about our problems. I'm the baby, so, I was kept very sheltered from things. My father was a veteran. That's about all I know."

Times were hard for the whole family when Penelope was young, but she also remembers how her mother took care of things: "She was always stealing from Peter to pay Paul, but she made sure there was an extra five bucks laying around somewhere so I could go to the movies with my friends. She tried to do everything that she could which I appreciate much more now than I did then, I'll tell you that. She was great." Penelope described her stepfather as "a very intelligent, very kind, hard working man." Although money was tight before her mother remarried, things got easier once her stepfather moved into the house; he worked at a tool and die department. Penelope's older brother works as a machine repairman and owns his home in Massachusetts, while her sister is divorced with three children, and still rents the house where they grew up: "She is still working at the same factory that we all used to work at growing up and the same one my mother did." Penelope went to a vocational high school and took distributive education courses. Since I had never heard of this technical track, I asked her to describe what it meant. "It's like business management. You run a little store inside the school and you sell things and stuff.. Of course, now, it's all computers and everything. But back then, that's what I thought was going to get me someplace. It did for a while."

Penelope thought she was preparing for employment but now she says she missed out on solid academic preparation for life. She didn't fit in academically or socially. "I was very rebellious and pretty much headstrong. I don't know how to put this. Don't you remember just going out and finding those little places in the woods and you have a little

fire going, guys carrying in the kegs. That kind of thing. Drive up the highway the wrong way. Write on rocks in the middle of the highway. Stuff my kids shouldn't ever hear about. Unfortunately, now I see the badness in it because I'm a mother. The big thing back then was taking a hit of speed. I never, never, ever, got into cocaine. I never remember ever seeing it. It was just what I call lightweight stuff."

Most of Penelope's friends started having sex around sixteen and she says at that time, there were no sex education programs in school. It was taboo to talk about those things. As she says, "Unfortunately, I didn't have a great sex talk with my Mom." Having children was not part of her original plan. "I thought I was not mother material. I loved dogs. It's like I'm obsessed with them. It was just going to be me on this little island somewhere with my dogs." Since she went to a vocational-technical high school, she also did not consider going to college. "I didn't think of college too much because I went to that school. It's a vocational technical school. They had a co-op project. When I got out of that school, I already had a resume. College wasn't really top-of-the-list priority for me. Figuring I could get where I needed to go with that." Her mother didn't agree. "She thought I should have finished regular high school because I switched in my sophomore year of regular high school to go into this school. She really wasn't for it. She thought I was going to be the first one she could really get through college. I was so rebellious. I just thought I was going to get ahead myself. I wouldn't have to go to college. That was wrong."

The first job she had was sewing piecework at the factory. Her Mom and sister worked there with her, and she made pretty good money for an eighteen year old. She

bought a used Jeep she always wanted. From there, she moved out of her mother's house and was commuting every day to pay for her car loan. Rather than work in a factory for long, Penelope wanted to own and operate a kennel. She worked for someone who bred dogs for a while. After saving some money she planned to move South with her boyfriend, but she "made a really stupid move and I lost all my dogs. So, that was the big plan. I took a trip to South Carolina and the truck broke down and I had to board the dogs and the kennel bill got outrageous." That was the end of her dream.

Penelope now has five children, every one of them unplanned. "He'll be three in June. She's four. She's five. One's going to be eight and one's going to be nine, very soon. I was pregnant at twenty. I was out of school and I was managing a pet store in the shopping mall. I was still living with him, had a great job, I was doing really good. Then I got pregnant. Not that I regret that. I was dating their father. I had been seeing the father for six months." I asked her what happened when she first got pregnant. "I flipped out. I was devastated. Like, what am I going to do? I knew right away. I was on an amusement ride. Octopuses. I love them. All of a sudden, I'm turning green and I'm telling the guy, 'Get me off this!' That's when I knew there was something up."

Penelope briefly considered having an abortion. "I don't think you're human if those options don't run through your head. Obviously, abortion was wrong. For me. Not that I condemn it. It's just not for me. I think I would do adoption before that. But once you carry this thing for nine months and go through all that pain, you can't do it. You can't go through with an adoption either." Penelope was young and scared, and with few

options, she ran away: "I didn't even call my own mother up, I had my boyfriend call her up and tell her that she was a grandmother."

Penelope has no family in northern New England. As she says, "I'm a roamer. I've lived in Rhode Island, I've lived in Massachusetts and New Hampshire and Maine. I was constantly moving around. Constantly. I was moving to what I thought was bettering myself, bettering my situation. Just the basic fact of landlord situation. The renting. To get away and try to find something new. Now I live with just my five children and myself. I rent a three bedroom house. One and a half baths. On a lake. It's kind of, it actually sits on top of a campground. So, the kids have space. I don't have to worry about traffic or anything. It's just been a little over a year now and I don't plan on going anywhere." Being a parent is more than Penelope expected. When she first got pregnant, she saw it as an "end of your life thing" but now she says it is not. She says that it has actually been "fun" for her -- a whole new beginning: "I think my Mom was a pretty good mom except for those issues of not talking. I think that's the only thing I'm really going to do different. Talk to my kids more and make them more aware of things. Of course, nowadays you have to. But I think I just watched my Mom. That's how I learned to be a parent."

She especially enjoys watching her children's new discoveries. "With my kids, they just crack me up 24 hours a day anyway. I get a little help, too, from good friends I have now. People I met recently. My Mom... I talk to her now. Well, not right now at this moment. We had a little dispute the other day, but we talk now. Not friend talk or mother-daughter talk. Just like how are the kids, yeah, fine, coming down for the

weekend, that type of thing. What she does is, she buys the kids what they need. Winter coats, you know, those expensive ones -- I still feel insufficient, that I can't go out and do this for myself. Even used coats are expensive. I'm 30 years old and I think I should be a little bit more independent than what I am. The bad things are all financial." Thinking for five other people besides herself means she is not as carefree as she once was. "I've got to put more thought before I make a decision, I guess."

Her boyfriend was 28 when she had their first child. He was the operations manager for a shopping mall. "He was a very intelligent man but not common sense wise. We met when I worked at the pet store. We moved here, and he was still commuting so he was never here. I was with him about seven years altogether." Her boyfriend was transferred to a different location, another mall owned by the same company. After that, the relationship started to get worse. "I got pregnant again and again and we had three children together. We used condoms; I was never on the pill. It got harder and harder, less enthusiasm, more conflict. I must have gained about 80 pounds. Pregnancy for me was a license to eat. It was. The whole relationship started falling apart after that."

Penelope went right from her ex-boyfriend to another man who was separating from his wife. "Mistake. I'm the wanderer. People and places. That relationship was great at first. It was exciting. It was new. Him and I packed up the truck. We were going to go away, make a better life, affordable housing down there in the South. Then that's when everything fell apart there too. It was so hard because we just ran out of money too soon. It wasn't really planned. It was a spur of the moment thing. Then when

all the trouble started happening, everything just, I said forget it." She had to call a friend to come and get them. Since her oldest son was born, she has moved at least nine times. Sometimes it was because the house they were renting was sold. As she says, "We never owned a home. Never owned anything. Apartment got too small or whatnot. Landlord's a jerk."

Penelope has been receiving public assistance for a long time. "I'm really not on state assistance for the older three because my ex does pay in like $500 a month. Then I get $50 passed through to me. I don't know if you're aware of that. All that money goes to repay the state for the money they're sending me. It's just that he's not so dependable that I can get off assistance and just expect that money to come in. You know what I'm saying? From the father of the other two, I have nothing. From Jerry and Michael's father, I get nothing. I already went through court. They said what they were supposed to pay but I still haven't seen anything."

The father of the older children has their home address, and sends his son and daughter birthday cards on their birthdays. He also usually sends them a box of presents on Christmas. He never sends an accompanying letter to Penelope, telling her about his current life or making any requests. She knows that he lives in Maine. After Penelope had her last child, she has decided to concentrate on raising her children. "I've been celibate for two years. The next time, if there's a next time, yes, I would like to get married. I'll do it all the right way the next time. I swear. I want to date somebody for at least six months before bringing them home and introducing them to my children. Because I am not going to get them attached to anybody anymore. Which sounds kind of

cold, I know, but it's like this protective barrier I have up now. After about six months, you can pretty much know where it's going, I think. If you have the same goals and whatnot and if it becomes serious, then I'll introduce them to them and then be married."

How does she describe a good man? She laughs. "Does he exist? A hard worker, one that comes home at night, enjoys kids, playing with them, easy going, laid back, spontaneous, that's about it." She thinks marriage is a good thing. She knows so many different types of people with different kinds of husbands and relationships. "I have friends whose marriage is just perfect. Stable, secure. I have other friends who are battling it out every day. From my point of view, I think marriage makes men's life better. They get to come home to the same person every night." She says that husbands usually get support, mentally as well as financially and emotionally from their wives. From the point of view of men she knows, however, they see marriage differently: "They think they've got the old ball and chain wrapped around them. They don't think they want marriage even though it's good for them."

With no hesitation, Penelope offers her ideas about why women's lives are harder. "First of all, the mothers usually get custody of the kids, not that the kids hold you back. There's always stuff to do, but I think that's just always a worry on the mother's mind. Whether you're getting good child care or what you're going to do. You just have to find all these good things so you can leave that worry behind and go do your job. I think in that way. When I was with my ex-boyfriend, I wasn't making enough to support myself. He was the primary breadwinner."

Penelope has many friends who have returned to school but she is fearful of that prospect: "Going back to school it's a scary thought. It really is. To be 30 and going back into school. Am I going to be able to remember this? Is this going to be worth it? What am I going to do?" There are few work opportunities for her education-level and skills, and her complaints echo the familiar dilemma of minimum wage workers: "Well, there's 'getting by' jobs and then there's what you want to do for the rest of your life." She is willing to work at convenience stores if that is going to pay her rent, pay for the food, pay for the gas, pay for the upkeep on her old car: "But $5 a hour just don't do that for a family of six." She also doesn't want to move again: "My kids are now in school. I've moved them once since they've been in school and that's only because the house, again, that I was renting was sold. I had no choice. I'm not going to do that anymore. I won't do it. They've been moved too many times. I'd like to show them some stability."

Penelope and her children receive AFDC, food stamps and Medicaid. Once every twelve months they apply for fuel assistance. "They'll help you out too. I don't know the exact numbers or whatnot, but this year I got $300 and something toward my oil. This year, I also had to apply to Department of Human Services for emergency assistance because my house is heated with wood and oil. I ran out of wood. So, I needed a cord of wood." Now she knows where to go for those things but when she first moved to New Hampshire she did not. "The people in those offices are okay, but they are not so willing to give you out the extra information you don't ask for. I guess that they think that I put myself in this position. I'm a moocher, so to speak, and I think they're kind of bitter about it." Penelope knows a lot of people who are "snobbish" to her when she goes to the

grocery store. "I do like to remind people, if I knew it was going to turn out this way, I would have done it differently. Not that I regret my kids. I love my kids to death. Situations come around and, unfortunately, not everyone is thinking correctly and..." her voice trails off. When Penelope compares her life to her mother's she sees two more children but not too much else that is different. She gets her household income from welfare rather than from a man, but like her own growing up experience, there is still that shortage of money. "My mother worked hard, granted I know that. But I don't feel as if I'm sitting back and just being a freeloader type person. I'm still struggling for money, still struggling to make ends meet, this and that. But I think she had it harder than me in some ways though. Simply for the fact that she had to get up and go to a job she hated every morning. And she lost her husband. I think that was harder for her. I lost my boyfriend but it was a choice."

Penelope makes the most of her monthly money and food stamps; she is a very frugal food shopper. "I never, my kids never go hungry. That's one thing. Just like the emergency assistance and stuff, I haven't done that consistently. This is my first year. Last year I did use fuel assistance, but not emergency. I think last year they gave me about $300 for the year." Her mother does not hand her cash, but just like when she was little girl, her mother seems to find the "extra five bucks" to make life a little easier. "I never know when it going to happen, but she takes a big huge weight off of my shoulders. When I was growing up, my mother made sure I had what I wanted, and that's what I got. I think we know what it's like to be that kid scorned. So, she'll buy my sons a Mighty

Ducks jacket. Make sure he has the cool sneakers because we still know what it's like to be teased. I will not send my kids to school in old dirty clothes."

When I asked Penelope about other kinds of support or help she receives, she hedges and mentions only one or two people. "I've pretty much shut down on friends. I always have that constant feeling that I'm being lied to. It's not paranoia. It's not. Because there's reality basis behind it. I'd rather have a few good friends than a lot of not so good ones. That's where I'm at right now." For money, she still turns to her Mom. Emotionally, she doesn't really turn to anybody. "Like today," she says, "I'm having one of my hissy fit days. Things are kind of going emotionally bad for me right now, so I'll make a big deal of some stupid little minute thing. But every morning, I get up, I put a smile on my face. I don't want my kids to know what troubles are ahead. I do it in other ways. I don't go and talk to somebody."

Penelope is more likely to be asked for emotional support, then to receive it from her friends. "I have one friend who's a basket case. Again, I love her to death but she's just a basket case. She flips out over everything and anything. I guess she does emotionally depend on me. That's good. That makes me feel great because I feel that I can give something back now. Not much but something. I just can't be doing it all the time."

Penelope identifies herself as religious, and she wants to bring up her children with Catholic beliefs and values. "I don't go to church every Sunday but I am trying to get that part of my life in order. I hope to get more serious about it soon, my son made his, what do they call that? First communion? He's going to make that. I have to get him

enrolled in classes and stuff. But they were all baptized or christened, whatever you call it. But I do have to start getting that part of my life in order. For me, I concentrate on one thing at a time." She wants her children to have a fuller, more complete education better than she had herself. She would like them to have careers instead of jobs doing something they want to do. Penelope dreams of getting her business up and going so that "when I'm gone, it could be theirs and they could run it and stuff like that. I want them to go to college. It took me a long time, but I finally got smart. Smartened right up." Penelope feels very optimistic. "I try not to get stressed out. I say what's this going to matter in 10 years if I don't get these dishes done tonight?" Mostly Penelope wishes she went further in school and was a little more worldly in her outlook. She feels good when she has helped one of her children achieve: "Like they've slid down the hill all the way in the snow or they finished some crafty thing or they colored inside the lines."

Towards the end of our conversation, Penelope discussed some of her thoughts about welfare: "I know people -- what do you call it -- stereotype people like us. And I admit, when I was not on welfare, I did it too. You're stupid, what are you thinking about, but stuff happens in your life. One minute, we were working and doing just fine, and the next minute here I am. These two words put together really piss me off -- you people. That just blows me off. I really don't believe that." Then she asked me hopefully, "Who's going to hear about this study? Or read about it? I hope you tell them how it is."

Since Penelope just found out that Catholics "aren't even supposed to believe in birth control", she has a new reply when people make negative remarks about her having five children. She replies, "I'm Catholic. Now, I have a new thing to throw back at them." She says she was lucky to have avoided pregnancy during her teenage years: "I had my oldest son when I was 20 years old. That's a respectable, decent age to have a child. I could have gotten pregnant way before that. When I look back on it now, if only my school or my mother would just have broken out of her protective role for five minutes to sit down and talk to me about birth control, I think it would have done me a world of good. I'm not blaming her. That's just her beliefs at the time. But I think it would have done a whole lot of good."

A "Transitional" Mother with Community Resources

Cecile, 25, grew up in northern New England with her mother and father. They met each other as teenagers working at the shoe factory that closed down in the late 1970s. For as long as Cecile remembers, her mother worked full-time and her aunt took care of her during the day until her father came home. Cecile's mother also worked in a factory that made safety clothing for people who work in the woods. Her mother graduated from high school but her father did not. As Cecile says, "I think he was a freshman three times. Then he gave up. He had to go to work." Her father has held a number of different jobs: he delivered beer for a while until that company closed. Then he worked in the warehouse until they sold to a different company. Now he is employed at a spring water company. There have been a couple of layoffs in her father's employment history, and whenever that happened, her uncle gave him some hours at his

gas station. Even when work was scarce, her father was able to find "fill in" jobs through family connections. Cecile says that she always had everything she needed, "It was just a matter of the extra things. My parents didn't agree on those things and my father usually spent his own money."

Figure 8. The Pattern of Cecile's Life Experiences

Childhood	Adolescence	Transition to Adulthood	Present Time
Parents married Both parents worked full-time in factory Father alcoholic Parents lived in town all their lives	One caring teacher Enjoyed shop class in high school Strict rules enforced by father Worked in service sector	Military experience Pregnancy and cohabitation Several part-time jobs	Receiving welfare; plans for work Home-schooling son Some relatives nearby Medium-sized network of Church members and friends No partner

Cecile explains that although her parents' income was about the same as most of the other families in her neighborhood, her father was an alcoholic and her mother was the only functional parent. "My Mom relies on God for her help. She has always been the patient one, my father wasn't a bad alcoholic, he didn't beat us, but it was almost that hard on us. We didn't count on him. It did get to a point once where my parents were fighting and I came home from school in the middle of it and I found the closet door and

his clothes flung on the sidewalk and my mother had done that. She is very thin, but she finally stood up to him and said hey, she had enough."

In some ways, Cecile says that growing up in an alcoholic family helped her learn to do things for herself. Now she has a closer relationship with her mother. "My Mom and I are very good friends. Some things, if I am excited about something that I am doing, she may not support me, may not verbalize that support, but down the line she may pitch in quietly." When Cecile started to get older and realize that her father wasn't always acting "like himself", she blamed herself and drew away from him. If he was drinking she would not be around him: "When he is being himself I will spend a whole day with him, whether it's splitting wood, fishing, or whatever. He is a wonderful person when he is not drinking." Sometimes she worried that her parents would divorce but they come from French-Catholic families, and all the couples in her extended family circle -- aunts, uncles, grandparents -- have stayed married. "My father has seven brothers and sisters, and no one is divorced. My mother is not the only one with a husband who drinks in the family, so I think they have been able to help her, pray for her at least."

When Cecile started high school she began having a very hard time. "My freshman year in high school was the worst." She had been enrolled in Catholic school for eight years and then switched to public high school, and once there she did not fit into a clique. "I liked everybody and if they don't like me, then it's their problem. But trying to fit in and trying to do all the schoolwork was hard." As she discusses her teenage years, Cecile describes a period when she had nowhere to turn. She couldn't keep up with the schoolwork, and she just didn't know what to do. Her parents watched a good deal of

television. "If the news or any other stupid program was on, I was not to talk to them. If it was a good show, I had to wait until the commercials. Their television was their priority, not that they meant it, but it was. As you can see, I don't have even one in my apartment, just for that reason. When you need to talk to your parents and they are glued to the television that is pathetic." Rather than seek out friends, her pet kept her company: "I had a cat that didn't talk back and yell at me. Maybe it's dumb, but he was just there, would sit there, that was my buddy. I didn't want to talk about my Dad with anybody. Why bother them with it." Cecile had a curfew but her parents were not strict. She was shy and quiet and they assumed she would follow the rules. One time when she was at camp, her friend pushed her in the water, and they had all their clothes on, and Cecile was terrified to go home wet. "My best friend said, I can handle your father, don't worry about him. When we went up to him I was scared and my mother was back there and she was really laughing, but she didn't want to show my father. I would have liked her to say it's okay, don't worry about it, but my father did get very angry."

Cecile complains that her parents always seemed to be overworked and they wanted to be left in peace when they were at home. They never asked about her homework or went to teacher's meetings. "I don't think they wanted to show that they didn't know how to do the math I was learning. They always said if you had questions you had to ask the teacher. They didn't show up for parent conferences or sports. I would have liked them to be involved and support me."

About the time she realized that her dad was an alcoholic, and while she was having trouble in school, she tried to commit suicide because she blamed herself and

thought she was the problem. When she tried to kill herself by taking prescription pills her parents were shocked. "My father cried and told me never to do that again. He bought me earrings and toys and flowers at the hospital, and I was like, this is not what I need." While her parents were upset and concerned they seemed not to know how to help Cecile. One of her teachers intervened and recognized her need for attention and support. "Mr. Smith gave me a ride home one day. I think I may have missed the bus because I had to stay after school for something. He said if you ever need someone to talk to please call. It was nice of him to do that."

School began to get better after her suicide attempt. Her favorite subject was science and she was the only girl who worked in the machine shop. "If I hadn't had machine shop I wouldn't have stayed in school. I was trying to decide whether to take auto mechanics or this thing called machine shop. I was talking to a guy in math class. He was like, well you can't do machine shop, you wouldn't be able to lift the metal. That was a challenge. So I took it and I did very well in it. I loved it."

She knew a lot of the boys from Catholic school and they respected her right to be a member of that male-dominated class. "There was a machine called a lathe in which you have to tighten and untighten to get your tool or piece out of it. Sometimes it's very, very hard to untighten and there was Paul, he would come over and if I would ask him if he could loosen it up for me, so he would loosen it up and then tighten it again just to give me a challenge. It's like they respected me -- they didn't do it for me." As Cecile was finishing high school, she began to think about her future. "My machine shop teacher had been in the Navy and he had someone come in to school and speak about

being machinists and where you would go and travel." Since she knew her parents wouldn't have money to send her to college, she signed up for the Navy and spent a few months there, but ultimately was sent home because she had epilepsy and could not pass the fitness tests. She says the experience was "not a total loss" because she met some wonderful people in the short time that she was there.

When Cecile returned home from the Navy, she went to work at an amusement park for the summer. She did not seriously ever consider applying to college: "I guess I could have done it if I wanted to, but I would have had to finance my own way. After the Navy my bubble burst. I was disappointed so I didn't want to pursue it. High school was bad enough and I didn't really want to go to any more schools. I don't learn in school. I learn by living." She moved home with her parents, and the next winter she took a job at a ski and sporting goods shop. She began dating a boy she knew from high school who worked next door to the shop: "He made me laugh. Nice guy, very hard working, very smart, college, he was studying at home, always learning something."

Six months later she got pregnant: "I didn't plan on getting serious with him, but I didn't want to be home with my parents watching television and listening to them argue. So he would make me supper and we would hang around at his apartment." She waited a few months to tell her mother that she had missed periods: "I work about a half hour away and I would have to pull over and take a nap on the way home. I couldn't drive all the way home without sleeping, I was so tired. So my mother finally approached me and said let's go to the doctor. She was worried."

Although Cecile and her boyfriend, Jack, got along well as friends, they were not serious about each other. They had different interests: "He was one of those people who liked to watch cartoons on a 90 degree weather day and I didn't. I wanted to go fishing." Cecile says she did not have the maturity to deal with compromising: "My thinking was, well you don't want to do this, so I am leaving." When Jack found out she was pregnant, he didn't want to be involved: "He was like, can you do something about it?" When he told her he wanted her to have an abortion, she responded that she didn't need his help, so he left to think and drive around. He then came back and asked if they could stay in their own places -- "like me with my parents, and him stay where he was so we could save money and marry." Cecile's parents did not see that as an acceptable alternative; they did not have the money to help her. Her mother said, "If you are going to have a baby, you better live together, at least." To her surprise, they did not suggest marriage because they had a niece who was in the same predicament and did get married and it was not a good solution. They did not want to force a marriage, but they did at least expect the father to take responsibility for Cecile and the baby. It was not solely their daughter's (or their own) problem.

From the beginning, the living arrangements were artificial: "We found an apartment and everything was split down the middle. He had his bills, I had my bills. It was very unmarried. I think we both still wanted to be independent in our own way. It's just hard when you are thrown into it, when you feel like you have responsibility to the child, it's hard to nurture that without being ready for love." Part of the reason Jack did not want to move in together was that he had not told his parents about the pregnancy.

"When I was almost ready to deliver, he finally told them that I was pregnant and we were living together. They were very religious and he thought they would disown him." Cecile and Jack stayed together for four years although it clearly wasn't working: "I told him that I didn't understand why he wanted me to stay here. He really didn't have an answer except that he wanted to do the best for us. But we couldn't do the best for our son if we couldn't do the best for us."

Cecile always planned to have children but not under her current circumstances. She dreamed of marriage and children as an escape, as a chance to correct things she regretted about her own growing up experience: "I thought I'd have a hoard of kids and a nice clean home and be a housewife, but yet smart, not shut in a closet, but very much part of the family and important to the family. That's how I wanted it to be." Now she thinks she will not get married. "I don't date, I don't want anything to do with dating. I have already had a child and now I am celibate." She grew up quickly and likes having family obligations to keep her focused. "I like being in control and learning how to be responsible and patient and all the things a mother needs to be." Jack takes their son every weekend and if she needs to do something at night, then he will go over and stay with Billy.

Religion has been increasingly important to Cecile during the past few years, but she always felt most comfortable in church: "When I was little I always wanted to go to church, even when it was closed, I would ask my parents to bring me. I always wanted to learn more about it. They wouldn't let me bring my Bible to church because I used to read it out too loud. Most people are afraid; they don't know where they stand on religion

or God, but I have thought a lot about it." She sees many women at church but not many men: "In a town like this, the church doesn't have a lot to offer the guys, the Catholic Church doesn't have a lot to offer anyone. You have men who are the head of the church and when you look in the benches, it's all women who are faithful."

Although Cecile says marriage is not for her, she has traditional ideas about how decisions get made in a family: "I think the man should be responsible for final decisions, but not without the wife's input. I think women can be wise and that they can alter a man's attitude, just by simple little things. God intended man to be the decision-maker, but not demeaning to the wife. He should teach his children the things that he knows, the wife should also. I think a boy should know how to sew as well as change a tire, and girl too." With no romantic relationships in her near future, Cecile heads her own household: "I kind of have to. If I need backup, especially disciplining my son, I would get his father involved, and we talk about it and his father backs me up 100 percent." Cecile says that her mother is pleased that her daughter feels she doesn't have to get married: "She doesn't want me to be in the same shoes she is in. As she says, it's not ideal."

After investigating the Catholic and public schools in town, Cecile consulted with Jack and she decided to teach their son at home. He is enjoying spending the whole day learning and playing with his mother instead of with a teacher. "He is very excited when he talks about it and I never really pushed it with him. I just asked him if he wanted Mommy to be his teacher and he said okay." In addition to educating her son, Cecile is a foster parent. "I don't have a child in my home right now, but I am licensed and I can

also do respite care. I filled out a lot of paperwork, and they ask all about me, and I went to training and then I got my license. If they have a child in their custody, let's say from an abused home, they would pull that child out of there. I would take any child Billy's age or younger, so when I get a call they give me as much information about the child as they can, and we go from there." Cecile has taken children for short-term stays at her apartment so far and she enjoys being part of the program. She is reimbursed for her food and rent and other expenses, although the program does not pay her directly for being a foster parent.

In order to devote time to home-schooling, Cecile had to leave her job as a hotel receptionist. Now, in addition to her other obligations, she baby-sits her friend's children in the afternoons. "We go over to her house after we do our lessons and she leaves for work. I am only getting $100 a week, but it is helping her out and it is giving me the flexibility I need right now. I do feel kind of guilty, because welfare still sends me food stamps. Jack also pays child support so that helps. He also puts $25.00 a month in a savings account for Billy."

Cecile expects to stay in the area and plans on making a difference for the community by foster parenting and home schooling and being involved with kids and friends and the church: "I think being a good person is a job in itself. If anyone in the community needs help, I tell them how to figure out where to go. I just like being helpful." Once Billy is finished with high school and on his own, she wants to move and do volunteer work full-time. "There is a place called Covenant House in New York and they have 1,200 kids a night that are homeless. Their parents don't want them. They are

on the street. I could live there and help these kids get back on their feet, get an education. That's what I want to do. It's making a difference." Cecile has found that she is a much better position as a mother of a young child than most of her friends, despite her worries and lack of preparation. Although she does not count on her friends and parents as Maura does, she has been able to maintain a healthy relationship with her child's father and they work together to co-parent. With the support of her Church, she has decided that this is best arrangement for Billy, for Jack and herself.

This chapter has presented the details of three women's lives who are each in different relationships to resources from their families and communities. As Maura's story shows, single mothers in rural communities benefit enormously from living close to their parents and siblings. Her parents were in a good position to invest resources early in her childhood and later when she was making the transition to adulthood. She also had strong ties in her neighborhood who provided friendship and emotional support as she coped with single motherhood. She was not competing with siblings for her families' help. By contrast, Penelope's lower class background made a difference in how much money her parents were able to share with their daughter-mother. Although the non-financial assistance that families offer may be helpful to women who are looking for work, returning to school, and caring full-time for children, Penelope and women like her need more comprehensive programs to help them become more independent. Although Cecile's family had too many other troubles to offer her much help, Cecile has been able to rely on her child's father for financial and parenting support and on her Church for developing her personal strength.

These cases suggest that the kinds of resources that two-parent working families need -- a decent income, emotional closeness, a home, time together and social support -- are the same things that make a difference for mother-headed households. Now, instead of depending on husbands as their only source of support, women facing difficult circumstances may turn to parents, other relatives and neighbors. Poor and working-class families develop strategies to survive based on the resources and relationships available to them. But some people do not have these relationships in place. The next chapter compares the life stages of women from strong and struggling families in the larger sample. Then I explain how a third group of women build broader social networks and use community institutions for the benefit of themselves and their children.

CHAPTER VI

A COMPARISON OF STRONG AND STRUGGLING FAMILIES

Parents often say they do not spend time thinking about how to raise their children -- they just *do* it. But most mothers and fathers have assumptions and expectations about what they want for their children. Many of the study sample women's parents devoted all their energy to keeping the household together. They married to bring security to their relationships and worked to provide resources for their children. They wanted to earn enough to be able to purchase a home, a trailer, or a camp for their families. They wanted their children to have a better life than they had themselves. Not all families achieved this goal, however. Some parents went through periods of unemployment and hard times, hoping that things would eventually get easier. Some mothers tried to hide family problems and "make it okay." Even when their marriages were in trouble, two-thirds of the couples managed to stay together at least until their children grew up. The remaining one-third of the women's parents divorced, forcing those mothers and their children to form new households, sometimes in an unfamiliar setting.

At eight or ten years old, the young women in this study began to form their own ideas about the kind of person they wanted to be. They saw their options for the future by looking at their older siblings and friends, and they received messages from important people in their lives -- parents, relatives, and teachers. The quality of these relationships either strengthened or diminished their aspirations, opened or closed their opportunities

for the future. As teenagers, these women's friendships and their romantic relationships with men also began to shape their future.

In Chapter IV I focused on overall patterns in the early experiences and current circumstances of the 50 women in my sample. In Chapter V I introduced the conceptual groupings. Now I compare the childhood, adolescence, and adulthood resources of the 20 women who are heading "strong" families with the 15 women heading "struggling" families. Olivia and Carrie, whose stories follow, are part of the "strong families" group.

Childhood

Strong Families

The majority of women in the "strong families" group were raised by two adults with steady work histories (see Figure 9). They grew up in large families, with relatives from at least one of their parents' families living nearby. Most women report seeing their grandparents on a regular basis. Often, they remembered visiting with cousins and other members of their extended families on Sunday afternoons after Church to share dinner before beginning another week. The parents of the women in my study had four or more children spaced close together. They believed in the institution of marriage, were religious, and wanted their marriages to succeed.

Only a few of the women had college-educated parents, but some of the women's fathers had spent time in the military, learned new skills, and "saw the world" for a couple of years. They married in their middle twenties, and saved for a house. Some lived at home with their parents for a few years to save money or to help out with younger brothers and sisters. Some ran small family businesses; or, fathers worked in a company

with benefits and earned enough so that mothers could take breaks from work when their children were young. Mothers worked as secretaries in a local business or sometimes in one of the many factories after graduating from high school. The wives and husbands had different responsibilities but they talked over and agreed on aims and goals for their family. They had high expectations for educating their children, and many sent them to the local parochial schools. These were mothers and fathers who earned enough money to pay their bills and make ends meet. These couples had the financial resources to care for their children, and with two parents at home, they had the luxury of spending time together, talking and listening to one another, and enjoying each other's company. Olivia and Carrie, whose stories follow, are part of the "strong families" group.

Figure 9. Comparison of Childhood

Strong Families (N=20)	Struggling Families (N=15)
• two parents (70%) • older parents (60%) • large families (50%) • parents had steady employment histories (95%) • mothers stayed home before children started school, then worked (60%) • lived in one place (80%)	• one parent (73%) • younger parents (80%) • small families (66%) • parents experienced periods of unemployment (66%) • mothers worked when children were young (66%) • moved two or more times (60%)

	Name	Two parents	Parents married > age 21	More than three siblings	Parents had steady work history	Lived in one place with family
Strong						
2	Patti	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
4	Maura	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
6	Elaine	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
8	Ginny	no	yes	no	no	yes
10	Olivia	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
11	Sophie	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
13	Betty	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

16	Rose	no	no	yes	yes	yes
17	Carrie	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
19	Agnes	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
22	Jane	no	yes	no	yes	no
25	Madeline	yes	no	no	yes	yes
28	Hannah	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
30	Lynette	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
31	Margot	yes	yes	no	yes	no
33	Missy	no	no	no	yes	no
35	Roberta	yes	no	yes	yes	yes
36	Chris	yes	no	no	yes	yes
41	Marianne	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
45	Polly	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Struggling						
5	Frances	no	no	no	no	no
7	Larissa	no	no	no	no	no
14	Denise	no	no	no	no	no
15	Stephie	no	no	no	no	no
18	Penelope	no	no	no	yes	no
24	Cory	no	no	no	yes	yes
27	Catha	no	no	no	no	no
29	Winnie	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
37	Lori	yes	no	yes	no	yes
38	Clara	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
39	Julia	no	yes	no	yes	yes
42	Felicia	yes	no	no	no	yes
44	Brenda	no	no	yes	no	yes
48	Corrine	no	no	yes	no	no
49	Sandy	no	no	yes	no	no

Olivia

Olivia, a 29 year old never married mother, sits on a couch in her small rented condominium in early December. She snuggles with her eight month old son as she describes her family of origin. "I'm fourth of six children. My mother married when she was twenty and was pregnant within a month. It was an Irish-Catholic family. She just

kept having children. They had six kids in seven years. Can you believe doing that now?" Olivia's father took some college courses and worked as a manager in a machine shop. They owned a four bedroom house. Since her father's salary was high enough to support the family, her mother stayed at home when the children were young. She took charge of all the childrearing responsibilities since her father was often working overtime.

Q: Did your parents worry about money when you were growing up?

A: I don't think that I ever knew about them but now that I'm older, definitely. My parents talk about it; yes, there was some worry. My father, basically he was the only one who was working. He made a good salary but it was very little money for having six kids comparatively. I wouldn't have known it until now, but God, we had a lot of spaghetti then. And powdered milk.

Olivia describes her house as a place where the neighborhood kids all gathered to play basketball outside in the summer. Her mother was a "Kool-aid Mom," as she puts it, and was always there to fix scraped knees or to make popcorn for them to eat during their favorite cartoons. They always had enough money to pay for extra outings and sporting activities at school and an occasional treat. Olivia performed well in school and in sports. She had a lot of friends in the neighborhood who would occasionally sleep over at her house. They would stay up all night playing jokes on her brothers, singing along with the radio, and watching television.

Q: What did you do for fun?

A: Basically we played with kids in the neighborhood. All the kids would hang out at our house. We definitely had one of those houses where you could come in and you could be a kid. There weren't any rooms that were off limits to the kids, no rooms you couldn't go in.

Olivia's brother had a major physical disability which kept their mother from looking for paid employment until he was placed in an all-day special needs program as an adolescent. With her father earning enough to pay the mortgage, Olivia's mother decided to attend college and graduated with a counseling degree. Now, after working full-time for the last fifteen years, she earns as much money as Olivia's father. They still have two younger children living at home, but within a few years they expect to be in a good position to retire early. Olivia's parents always expected that their children would go to college and they were able to put some savings aside for each of them.

Carrie

Carrie, also 29, has been married twice and is the mother of two children. We met at her apartment in a two family house on the East Side owned by her parents. Like Olivia, she was also born into a large family and lived in an apartment house owned by her grandfather and eventually sold to her parents. Carrie's father and mother met, married, and raised nine children in the same town and they are one of the well-known families in their community. Her father and his brothers operated a paint business and her mother's family were caterers for weddings and other social functions. When she reflects on her past, Carrie suspects that they did not have a lot of extra money, but she was not aware of financial worries in the household -- her memories are that times were pleasant because her parents owned their home and their lifestyle was more comfortable than her friends' parents. Everyone thought they had a lot of money.

Q: Were there worried about money when you were young?

A: I've been out of the house for 11 years now. I'm finding out piece by piece that, yeah, my parents did have money problems. But see, the thing is, it wasn't obvious to us because my parents own their home, well, more

or less, and my parents own a summer cottage too. They've had that for 31 years or so. Plus they have an apartment building in town. Actually, they have two now, but when I was growing up they had one. Since I was about 10 they've had the building I live in now. So, it wasn't something you would notice, everybody would always say, you know, he's got his own business, you guys have all these blocks, you know. So, in our eyes, we had quite a bit. We weren't poor. Growing up on the west side of town, we could see the east side -- which is where we are now -- was always considered the bad part of town because nobody had anything, they said, on this side. Whoever they is.

Carrie describes the neighborhoods in her town as divided between those who "had something" and those who did not. The distinction was made by the clothes you wore and the house in which you lived:

Q: Tell me about the difference between the east side and the west side.

A: The east side was where all the apartments are and the west side was mostly houses. There were more kids I went to school with that grew up in apartments, as compared to living in houses like we did. We didn't really know about everyone's money situation too often, but you could kind of see the difference.

Still, Carrie remembers that her family regularly accepted gifts of food from her aunt's and uncle's business. She thinks that with so many children her parents may have had enough savings in the bank to purchase a home from her grandfather -- "to put a roof over their heads" -- but did not have enough cash to afford some other items. Business was bad during the recession in the early 1980s, but Carrie was never aware of these problems. Her mother went to work selling Avon and giving Tupperware parties, and in her view, they seemed to have enough.

Q: How do you look back on it now that you are older?

A: I've come to find out, well, see, my mom's sister and her brother-in-law were caterers. They would always give us leftover food from catering occasions and whatnot. It always came to our house at the nick of time. When there was nothing extra in the wallet to feed the kids with. It always

> worked out. But I never knew that. I always thought it was, "Oh, cool, Aunt Florence's coming with food." Leftover wedding cake and all kinds of stuff like that. Baked ham and lobster newburg. It was always thought of as a treat but actually it was a necessity.

One might wonder how Carrie's definition of necessity might differ from the other women in this study. Her family had resources, and by sharing them, Carrie's family was able to maintain a higher standard of living. Without Aunt Florence's help, they would have eaten, but not as well.

Struggling Families

The "struggling families" group had parents with unsteady work histories. Most of their parents did not finish high school, and they married young without knowing what to expect from marriage. Because neither parent had valuable work skills, the families had no choice but to move when a job opportunity arose. Few families owned any property at all, and some of their marriages broke up from economic pressures that led to constant arguments. The women in the struggling group were more likely than those in the strong group to spend time in single parent families or in "blended" families -- with step-parents and step-siblings (see Figure 9). When one of their parents remarried, they often moved again to another home, where they had to adjust to a different school environment and make new friends.

Many of these women recalled that they felt uncomfortable at school, and they had too many burdens at home to care about doing well in school. They did not play sports or receive any special recognition, and they did not receive "the right kind of" attention from teachers in the classroom. Their parents were supportive but stressed themselves, and the girls heard all of the family fights and knew exactly how tight money

was for the month. They felt they were "not like the other kids" who had new clothes and spending money while their mothers shopped at the Salvation Army and used food stamps at the grocery store. Frances and Winifred, described next, are part of the "struggling families" group.

Frances

Frances, 32, is the mother of three sons. For the interview, we met at the Technical College cafeteria. From the time she was born, Frances lived in a small trailer park on the far side of town, with one older sister, one younger sister, and her mother and father. Her parents met when they were teenagers. Her Mom worked as a waitress at a diner and her Dad used to eat meals there on his lunch break. Neither of them graduated from high school and they made very little money. Frances told me about going to an elementary school wearing clothes that did not fit and being teased by her classmates. With three young children to support, her father was badly hurt in a work-related accident but he continued to hold a job as long as he could.

> Q: Did your parents worry about money when you were growing up?
>
> A: Oh, yeah. All the time. I think everybody does. My father was disabled since the time I was young. I can't really remember just how old. I would say between the ages of six and eight. He got hit by a truck and I guess it broke all the vertebrae in his back and he had to have some replaced. He just couldn't lift or move or turn that much.

Her father did not want his wife to work or drive a car. Frances's mother stayed at home, cleaned and cooked and tried to make ends meet on his meager earnings and food stamps. Her mother was close with her daughters and took great pains to make sure that they felt safe as children. Although they did not have a steady household income,

Frances's father would pick up odd jobs with his brothers and cousins to earn a few extra bucks before he was disabled:

> Q: How did your parents make ends meet?
>
> A: Before he was hurt, my father would do, like, extra things. Like he'd collect brass from the dump and stuff like that and, at that time, that was a big thing, you know. To get a lot of brass. But I don't think he ever borrowed any money that I know of. My mother wanted to work but he forbidded it. She didn't work until after he died.

Finances were not the only trouble in Frances's life. After her father was hurt, her parents had less money and they fought daily about the bills. Her father spent more time at home and was depressed about not having the physical ability to work any longer. Since he did not want his wife to hold a job, the entire family lived on a disability check, much of which he spent on alcohol. This caused problems between Frances's parents and it also created an additional strain in the house. Everyone was afraid of her father's moods.

> Q: How were things in your house at that time?
>
> A: My dad drank every other day like clockwork. And he drank and drank. It wasn't social. He was an alcoholic. My mother made everything fairly easy. She made life acceptable even though things weren't acceptable, like drinking. When she knew he would be home, we wouldn't be there. We'd be doing something that would keep our mind in a different area. By the time we went home, he was sleeping it off. Mom was incredible. I mean, we didn't have a lot of money. We didn't have a lot of toys at all. But she was very creative. She cut out newspapers, paste them to cardboard and make dolls out of them. She was just incredible.

Frances hated watching her father's temperament and body deteriorate, and although she was close to her Mom, she dreamed of the day she would finish school, find her own job, and leave the house. Her parents did not get along well. Her father was

abusive and there was not much her mother could say because "if she looked at him the wrong way, he'd slap her." Frances said that they all used to argue with each other, but her father was usually the person introducing the violence: "We didn't know the luxury of getting hit with a belt. We used to get hit with a vacuum cleaner cord. And we used to have knock out, drag out fights." Her mother would jump in the middle but she could not pull them apart: "You can only do so much when you're getting knocked across the room." Frances was often the object of his anger, and her few friends in the neighborhood would invite her to their house to play, but stayed far away from Frances' house.

Q: What happened when your father got angry?

A: I was the littlest one with the biggest mouth. And the mightiest temper and I would, I don't know. I guess I got under my father's skin. I really didn't put up with his attitude and the things that he would put out on everybody else and I used to stand right there and tell him so. And then there would be punching and hitting and being knocked up against the wall and having the kitchen chair fly across the room. We didn't know what a normal life was. And he didn't care who was there. The neighbor kids used to run. They used to go "uh-oh" and fly down the hall. You know, out the door.

Frances left school her second year in high school because she had no friends left and wanted to "start her new life." Without any planning, she ran away to Florida by herself and tried to find work, but with no degree and no work experience, she had a hard time.

Winifred

Winifred, 34, is the mother of four children. I met her in her third floor apartment after she had just finished buying her groceries for the week. As we talked, we unpacked

them and put them away. Winny grew up in another state with several step-siblings. Her parents had each been divorced two times. Both of her parents worked full-time at a shampoo factory and the children were left to take care of each other. Winny's father eventually was offered a job by his cousin who worked as a carpenter. They moved three times when she was growing up. They never owned property but they did have a station wagon and they rented a big drafty old house. I asked her,

> Q: Did your parents worry about money when you were growing up?
>
> A: I don't recall that they *worried* about money. I do know that we didn't have a lot of money. The bills -- rent, heat, electricity and food, that was the priority. Make sure the bills were paid first. There wasn't a lot left over for extras.

Winny explained that because both her parents were working, she felt the need to do chores around the house and baby-sit her younger brothers. She knew that school was important but she did not have time to do her homework after getting the meals together, changing the diapers, and making sure that everything was in its place. She faced a lot of responsibilities when she was just a child herself:

> Q: What do you remember most about school?
>
> A: Well, I didn't care for school that much. I didn't have time. I think I, growing up, I had to be more responsible than most kids because there was two younger than me. I had to kind of look out for them. The older ones were moving out one at a time and getting on with their lives. There's five older than me and two younger, a brother and a sister.

The summer before starting high school, Winny's parents moved the family to another town about an hour away from where they had been living. Her father thought that he would earn a higher wage as an electrician. It was hard being in a new school and Winny suddenly had no friends and no motivation to do well. Like Frances, Winny left

school before graduating and opted for taking a GED instead of a diploma. She did not know what to do next.

Adolescence

Strong Families

The women heading strong families, those who are raising their own children successfully as adults, shared some common experiences when they were teenagers (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Comparison of Teenage Years

Strong (N=20)	Struggling (N=15)
• adult role models • supervised social activities • involved in sports, clubs or academics • worked part-time • spent some time away	• strained adult relationships • little supervision; discipline problems • felt "weeded out" of school • worked part-time • trapped at home

	Role models	Supervision	Involved in school	Part-time work	Time away
Strong	15 of 20 (75%)	20 of 20 (100%)	20 of 20 (100%)	13 of 20 (65%)	17 of 20 (85%)
Struggling	4 of 15 (27%)	5 of 15 (33%)	5 of 15 (33%)	10 of 15 (66%)	6 of 15 (40%)

Most of them liked school, and even in cases when they did not enjoy school and were desperate to graduate, they performed well and earned decent grades. They had friends and were involved in social activities in school. Most held after-school jobs and they earned enough money to pay for their own clothes and expenses after they turned sixteen. Even in cases where both parents were working outside the home, arrangements were made for the children to be occupied by work or activities, and supervised after school. Few of these women dated seriously when they were teenagers, and most postponed

sexual experimentation until they were in serious relationships, perhaps out of fear of pregnancy rather than for moral or religious reasons. Margot and Agnes also represent this group.

Margot

Margot, 31, is a divorced mother with one young daughter. We talked in her back yard while five year old Leah waded in a plastic pool with her friend. Margot told me that she did not like junior high school ("Who does?" she says) but her grades were solid, and she did have teachers who cared about her progress. Her parents owned a small family grocery store and she always preferred spending the afternoons working the cash register or making sandwiches at the deli. Margot's work was essential to the business because her father was ill. During her senior year she worked at the store more than she was in school. Although another student may have been treated differently in this situation, the school principal knew Margot's family well, and bent the rules so that she could graduate on time.

> Q: How did you do in school?
>
> A: Since I was about 14, I worked and I went to school. I helped out my folks. I was absent from high school so many days I almost didn't graduate. My dad gets leg ulcers and he went to the hospital for, like, I think we counted 50 days. So I would help my mom, because she was alone at the store. By the time I graduated, I could open, I could close, I could balance the books. But I had to explain my teeth off so I could get my diploma.

Margot had many friends in the neighborhood, and because she was responsible at work she felt responsible and mature enough to set her own curfew. Her parents trusted her and were fairly lenient. "They didn't need to worry about me or my sisters," Margot

said. She remembers spending her free time with friends, and they "knew how to have a good time" but she also was aware that relatives and neighborhood parents were watching out for them:

> Q: What sort of things did you do?
>
> A: I was 15 and one night we snuck into H------ Park and we were sitting and drinking Miller beer. I was all excited because I was drinking my first beer. But I was terrified because it was 9:00 and my uncle always drove home one of the cashiers who lives down by there.

Margot's uncle did not see her, but she went home early that night. She rarely took risks. In fact, usually she was the person who everyone counted on to be "the responsible one." She did not even date until she was out of high school.

Working at the grocery store was interesting and helpful to her family, but once her father regained his health, she sought new opportunities. Margot's favorite aunt worked as a nurse at the hospital and she told her once that it was the kind of occupation where one could always find work. From her experience with her father's illness, she knew that she was good at comforting others. When she saved enough money, she enrolled in science courses and began working towards a degree which would qualify her as a registered nurse. She wanted to be able to travel and hoped that she could move away for a while.

Agnes

Another woman in this group, Agnes, is a 23 year old mother who has never been married. She grew up in a tidy, two-family home owned by her parents. Agnes explained that her aunt and uncle lived upstairs and she and her sisters each had their own bedroom downstairs. Her father worked in the mill and her mother worked as a nurse part-time on

the weekends. Her parents both immigrated to the United States, and they moved to the area to join other relatives who had established themselves in the area. They sent Agnes to Catholic school, and they set strict curfews and watched the friends she brought home closely. They were "overprotective to the point of embarrassment," according to Agnes. She said, "I was not allowed to date until I was sixteen which was the time that I met my son's father. I went out with people, but it was mostly in crowds, so it wasn't really considered dating." She insists that the girls at the parochial school were "way behind" the social scene of their public school peers. She was almost 17 when she first had sex: "I was one of the last in my crowd. I was a junior in high school. The rest of my friends were sophomores at the time." Although birth control was available through a local family planning clinic that advertised their services in the local paper and stated that all doctors visits would be kept confidential, Agnes and her friends were reluctant to go into the office because it was located on Main Street where people would notice who went in and out of the building. Because she had a tense relationship with her "traditional" mother and father, she was very worried that they might find out she was having sex.

> Q: What were you most worried about?
>
> A: What if my parents find the condoms? That was always the big thing -- what if my parents find out? I finally made an appointment at family planning to go on birth control. It must have been May or June. They told me there was a waiting list and I couldn't get in until July.

Agnes and her boyfriend had been having unprotected sex for several months. After hearing stories about venereal diseases and helping her best friend through her pregnancy, she worried that she could have contracted something from her boyfriend, since she

learned he was sleeping with another girl. Agnes decided she was not going to have sex again for a while.

Struggling Families

The women heading struggling families, those who are now having trouble raising their own children, also shared some common experiences when they were teenagers (see Figure 10). Some women had learning deficits and discipline problems in school, and the transition to high school was especially hard for these teenagers. Or, their parents divorced and their housing situations changed. Their friends were trouble makers who skipped school and regularly got drunk. Although many of these women sought attention from parents and teachers, they had few role models and they did not expect much from themselves. Many left school early. Most of these women started dating men older than themselves when they were fifteen or younger, and they were having sex when their parents were not home. Yvonne and Brenda are part of this group.

Yvonne

Yvonne, 23, was a poor student who was troubled all the way through school. She never seemed to do well, and her teachers paid little attention. She started "skipping out" during junior high school. Although she had been a quiet student, she went through a rather rebellious period; "I wasn't really, like, a bad kid. You know I just kind of followed the crowd. I wasn't really the leader. I just maybe tagged along, you know, if it sounded like a good idea, then went along with it."

Her parents would see her report card and punish her for failing grades. But, as Yvonne said, "There was never really any power to that. I mean, it was just, you know,

kind of like words. There was nothing, ever anything to back it up. Nobody really ever watched me do homework. It was kind of like I had to just take the initiative myself or else no one else would." At ages fifteen and sixteen, doing well in school was not a priority for Yvonne. She held a part-time job at a tanning salon and she stayed out late with her friends: "I just thought, well, I'll get by. I never wanted to fail, but I also didn't, it wasn't important to me to get really good grades back then."

Just before Yvonne was entering high school, her parents divorced. They split custody of the children -- her younger brother went with her mother and she lived with her father and his second wife. The arrangement did not work from the beginning:

> Q: How did you get along with your step-family?
>
> A: My two step brothers were older than me and my stepmother and I didn't have much in common. Even when we were living in the same house we'd still didn't really communicate. It was, you know, "Hi, how are you?" but not really like a family. It was more like two separate families living in one house, her kids and me and my dad, and it was very hard. It was an awkward house. We all had TVs in our bedrooms. And at night we would all just retreat to our own bedrooms. We didn't have dinner together. We'd make ourselves something to eat, go up in our room and eat it and watch TV and you know we might bump into each other in the kitchen but we really didn't spend any time together at all.

Yvonne became friends in high school with a group she called "the losers" who used drugs: "I got caught up in that and going out and then the next year I was hanging around with my new boyfriend." She spent most of her spare time at her boyfriend's mother's house because no one was home there at night: "His Mom was one of the ones who's never home. I'm not even sure if she actually worked. I'm not sure where she went. I think she just hung out at bars so he was home alone all the time." Her father did not set any rules, so Yvonne stayed there almost all the time: "I basically lived there for almost a

year and a half and I'd say a good year of it I spent nearly every night over there. We were only, like, fifteen, but it was just like playing house."

Yvonne's father was uninvolved in his children's lives, and he was not an authority figure to them: "He didn't set any restrictions. I didn't have a curfew and I could kind of come and go as I pleased. Nobody would really notice. I wasn't really neglected, but I guess in a sense I kind of was, because nobody really paid any attention to me." Yvonne got pregnant during her last year of high school, at the same time as four of her friends:

> Q: What were your friends lives like when you got pregnant?
>
> A: I'm not sure why but almost all of my friends have children, the same age as my son. I had a friend who got pregnant about a year before I did and then my best friend had her son in January, another friend had her daughter in April, I had my son in May and then one of the friends who had her daughter in April, had another child and then about a year, and a half later another friend of mine had a baby. So it seems as though in my circle of friends we all had children. Except for probably 1 or 2 people that I was close to they don't have children. It was very, very odd.

Yvonne's father disowned her for getting pregnant so Yvonne moved in with her boyfriend ("for real") and she dropped out of school.

Brenda

Brenda, an 18 year old new mother, also faced major problems when she started ninth grade. Like Yvonne, there were many changes in her family taking place at the same time. It was the same year her parents divorced and she and her mother and sisters found a new apartment in the next town. She described a change in their standard of

living -- the result of a dramatic drop in their income after her father left the household. She found herself the unwelcome stranger among the students in her new school.

> Q: What was school like for you?
>
> A: At first it was fun. I always got along with everybody. I liked junior high. Then in high school everything turned around -- for the worse. People were rude. High school is all cliques and if you don't fit in with one then you just don't really fit in. I am not a judgmental type person and I don't want to be in just one group. There were a lot of preppies with attitudes and then there were the nerds and the druggies and I just didn't get along with anyone.

Brenda's grades were had always been fairly high ("school was easy") but she was tired of school and could not deal with the pressures that were building up at home. Her mother was unhappy and the whole situation was too much for the family to handle. She could not or would not adjust to being part of a new school. "It was just a lot of things kept building up and I was sick of it. I did better out of there. So I got my GED right away. It's just better for me." At the time, she needed a better social life and wanted to meet people. She always was friends with older kids and she found them in the neighborhood:

> Q: What did you do after you left school?
>
> A: I was about 15. They had parties, like with big bonfires up on Side Road and stuff like that and the big sand pit. We went four-wheeling a lot, just hung out. There was alcohol and beer, pot, cocaine, all kinds of stuff. Usually if you go out with somebody then your friend starts going out with your boyfriend's friend, so you all go out in a group thing.

Like Yvonne, Brenda wanted to escape the worries and anxieties she associated with her family and school. But she stayed in the neighborhood, where she first met her child's father, and became pregnant soon afterwards.

Pregnancy

Strong Families

The women in the strong families group became pregnant after graduating from high school; most were in their twenties and had some work experience (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Comparison of Pregnancies

Strong (N=20)	Struggling (N=15)
• prepared pregnancies • no marriage, no breakup • income mostly from family, work and non-cash public assistance	• unprepared pregnancies • quick marriage or quick breakup • income mostly from AFDC and other • public assistance

	Prepared pregnancy	No change in relationship	Change in relationship	AFDC (cash assistance)
Strong	14 of 20 (70%)	13 of 20 (65%)	7 of 20 (35%)	5 of 20 (25%)
Struggling	6 of 15 (40%)	6 of 15 (40%)	9 of 15 (60%)	9 of 15 (60%)

These women either had good jobs themselves or they were with living with partners who worked full-time. For the most part, their parents were supportive about their decision to have a child. These women were in the fortunate position to prepare for the arrival of the child either by moving home with parents or relatives, by cohabiting with boyfriends, or by continuing a long-term relationship. They were not competing with their sisters and brothers for their parents' assets. In fact, living near their families ensured a ready supply of loans, advice, and baby-sitters. Linette, Ginny, and Chris, below, are good examples.

Linette

Linette, 30, lives with her two children in an apartment near her sister's and mother's house. She recently ended a six year relationship with her partner. He was pressuring her to get married, but after all this time, she is still unsure. Her parents'

marriage ended after almost 35 years together and she has become disenchanted with the whole idea of marriage. She wonders if any couple can withstand the inevitable crises that are part of family life and still make their marriage work. She has watched her older sisters and her friends marry and divorce and concludes that "nothing is forever anymore."

Q: What do you think about marriage?

A: I lived with someone for five and a half years starting when I was about 18 and he asked me to marry him on several occasions and I didn't. I don't know if it's just because I'm a little bit rebellious and I figure living with someone is as good as being married to someone, but the piece of paper didn't mean that much to me. I don't know if it's because marriage is this big... I think to Catholics, marriage is supposed to be an important thing.

Until Linette was 18 years old she "was forced" to go to church every weekend whether she liked it or not. She is dismayed by some of the rules that her mother, father, and teachers ingrained in her when they were not following them themselves. Her parents wanted all of their children to go to college, to get married, and to raise their own families -- in that order. Linette, however, sees few incentives to settle down into a marriage, but she has a strong desire for children:

Q: What do you think about marriage now?

A: That whole marriage thing is like a sacrament in the church and I just don't know if I believe in it that much. There's been a lot of bad marriages in my family. I believe any relationship takes a lot of work whether you're married or not. I don't believe that because you're married, you're going to try any harder at a serious relationship than if you're not.

After high school, Linette finished a year of college before taking a job as a legal secretary. She loves her work and has no plans to leave. She dated her boyfriend from

high school, Paul, off and on for a while, and they had sex when they went camping for a weekend. When Linette found out she was pregnant, she told one of her sisters before telling her mother because she was convinced that this news was more than her mother could handle. It seemed as though every one of them had caused their mother to worry. "Two of my sisters got married pregnant. One had an abortion before she was married because she was afraid it was going to devastate my mother if she got married pregnant. So, she had an abortion instead. That makes a lot of sense." Linette's sister assured her that their mother had been through it all before -- it was not an ideal situation but it would be okay. "So I broke it to my mother. I cried. I felt like I had let her down in some ways. I wasn't devastated because I was pregnant. I wasn't unhappy. I was happy about the pregnancy but I felt sad for her." Linette stayed with Paul, and they had the baby together, but they disagreed about what should happen next. She did not want to get married while he insisted it was the right thing to do:

> Q: What did your boyfriend say?
>
> A: He definitely thought we should [get married]. He thought that it was going to make things better, it was going to make things right. But I just didn't think that was going to change anything. I was having a baby. I didn't need to get married because I was having a baby. One's not a pre-requisite for the other.

Linette and Paul lived together for several years and he continued to ask why she did not want to get married. As time went by, it became a problem for them, but Linette looks back on it as an important trial period for their relationship. As their daughter was getting to be a toddler, she saw that he wasn't the kind of involved parent she expected for the father of her children. He also didn't have commitment to a career. He worked as a ski

instructor in the winter season and took summers off. "He wasn't ambitious. I was doing most of the work in the house, both the earning and the mothering." Linette decided that she preferred to raise the children without him. She had a few sisters living nearby and her mother was retired so she could baby-sit while Linette was at work. After five years, she asked him to move out. She applied for public assistance to help pay for child care and medical coverage and she started again on her own for the first time in her life. She said it felt very good.

Chris

Chris, 28, is living in a house owned by her parents while she adjusts to being a single mother. She is glad to be living near her parents while she settled the terms of her divorce with her ex-husband. Her mother taught her to deal with problems as they arose and not to let disagreements build up over time. Although her parents were strict when she was younger, she thinks they set a good example with their long term marriage to each other and their good communication. Her parents believed in discussing issues with the children and they had "long serious talks" after dinner. She describes her parents as the kind that all her friends wanted but did not have. She was the girl in high school who always dreamed of getting married and having children. Chris dated a few guys from town, and her friends told her that she had a knack for finding the "nice" dates:

> I always dated older guys. It was just you know, this is probably stupid but, it seemed, maybe it was probably a Catholic thing, but I always thought I had pretty good morals and the younger boys, the guys my age, you know 17, 18 were interested in how far they were going to get with you. Whereas the guys who were 21 or so, who had kind of gone through that so they were more interested in just, you know they were the ones more apt to just take you out to a movie or take you out to dinner and just leave it at that instead of you know you don't have to be like fighting them off and saying "no."

She went to the state college after high school and graduated, but had no plans for a career. She "tried out" different occupations and finally settled on a job at the local bank: "It paid the bills, but it wasn't terribly exciting." Chris went through a period where she was "going through that whole first love thing" and she wanted desperately to be a mother. She stopped using birth control pills and got pregnant. Although her boyfriend, Ted, had good qualities, they did not want to rush into marriage too soon. As she said, it would have been a lot of change to deal with all at once. They decided to stay together and see how things went.

Ted made a low salary as a camp counselor but they borrowed some money from his relatives to cover the rent in their new condominium. Chris' family was supportive and they visited them and bought a lot of clothes and toys for the baby: "I don't know what I would have done without my mother," she said. "Ted didn't make enough. It wasn't his fault, but I guess neither of us knew how much work it would be to have a baby." Their relationship lasted through the pregnancy, and to please his parents, they got married soon after their baby was born. Chris loved being a mother and Ted had settled into a better-paying sales job. For a while, it seemed like things were going well.

Q: How did you like being a mother?

A: I was home with my daughter for two and a half years, and I only worked part time. That to me is the best role I've ever had in my life. I mean I could have given June Cleaver a run for her money. You know I loved it, I just, I loved it. I loved raising a child. My family thinks I'm crazy but I loved being pregnant. I was fat but I didn't care. I was just so focused on being happy and really creating a good, positive environment for this little human being that was growing inside me. I was never even sick. I loved being pregnant. If I won a large sum of money that's probably what I'd do, I'd have babies, I mean I just I just, I love family. I liked getting up and making my husband breakfast. That was the role for

me, I loved raising her. I liked changing diapers, I liked getting up in the middle of the night.

A few years later, while Chris was keeping the house, her husband began staying out late at night and "working" on weekends. She later learned that he was having an affair with someone he met through his job. Although they tried to stay together for two more years, they both decided the marriage had ended. With her parents' support, she moved home with her daughter to be near her family. She returned to her job at the bank, and she found a good day care center for her daughter.

Ginny

Ginny, 27, has one child and has lived with her partner for almost ten years. She was a cheerleader and she was president of her high school class. She went to a private school and her grades were mostly A's and B's. Her parents could not afford to send her to college, so she was taking a few courses part-time while deciding what to do in the future. She was dating an older man, Mike, for about a year and they were serious when she got pregnant. Ginny was working in a laundry and her boyfriend had a good job at a computer business. They were ready to have a child in their early twenties. Although she would not tell her mother that her pregnancy was planned, she insists it was exactly what she hoped for.

Q: What was your life like when you got pregnant?

A: I was taking classes at the community college. And I was working in the Laundromat on weekends. I just kind of wanted a baby. So, we talked about it for months. He wanted to get married and he thought that would make me get married, and I said no. But I wanted to get pregnant, I don't know why. I mean we were trying and it took me like three months. We had enough money to have a baby and that's what I was more concerned about. Not marriage.

For Ginny, the decision to be a parent was mostly a financial one. If they could afford to take care of a baby -- they could -- then it was the right time to do it. She knew that she wanted to have children and since she was "young and strong," it was the safest time to give birth: "It was going to happen some time, then why not now?" She did not view marriage as a necessary part of creating a family, however, but she needed to convince her boyfriend that they should wait and decide later whether they should marry.

> Q: Can you tell me a little bit more on your views about marriage?
>
> A: I don't think a lot of guys today take marriage for what it is. I mean, I think it's a total commitment and we need to be ready. That's your life partner from there on and I just...I think people say that but I don't think people feel that, you know. If I thought someone really felt that way, I might marry him. But Mike's ten years older than me and he's been married before. So obviously, he doesn't take those vows as seriously as I do. But we have been happily together for 10 years.

It was not that she didn't love him, but since he had been married before (briefly when he was a teenager), she didn't want to be a "second" wife. Ginny and Mike have been happily living together and raising their son for a long time. Being married has lost some of its importance for Mike, although he asked her on the anniversary if she felt like getting married. He knows that she has no plans to leave -- they are committed, call each other husband and wife, and she even wears a ring, but they haven't made the marriage official. Ginny finished her degree and now works full-time in the mental health field: "I like having my own name and doing my own taxes," she says.

Struggling Families

Women in the struggling group became pregnant when they were teenagers and were, as a group, less prepared for parenthood (see Figure 11). They had regular contact

with their families, but they did not have parents, friends and partners who were in the position to help them out. Their sisters and brothers needed as much help as they did themselves, and there was little money or support to spread around. Some of the women in this group felt pressured into making a quick decision about marriage, adoption or abortion. They did not have finish school or have work experience to help them support their household. While a generation ago, marriage could have been a solution to their predicament, these marriages were unhappy and unstable. Most of the women ended up alone and were forced to rely on welfare. Catha, Denise, and Wendy have similar stories.

Catha

Catha grew up with her mother and brother in a trailer park. She got pregnant when she was fifteen years old by a man in his twenties she met once. She never told him about the pregnancy because she was afraid. Her due date was on her sixteenth birthday. After Catha's mother consulted with her aunt and a few other relatives they decided to send her to a home for unwed mothers in another state to delivery the baby and give him up for adoption to "a mother and father who could raise him better." Her mother was in no position to help her and this program did not cost any money. Although Catha did not want to leave home and move to an institution, she reflects on the experience saying that the place was great. "I had so much fun there. Well, just imagine getting a bunch of girls from all over the United States. We had restrictions and curfews and times that we were allowed to go out walking and times that we weren't, but I was really full of energy." Catha also learned about pregnancy and nutrition while she was away. She does regret that she gave the child up for adoption:

> It was like I didn't even have a chance to think about it. It all happened so fast. I didn't know about my options. I was so young and it seemed right. I signed the papers though, so there was no going back. I know I couldn't have done it on my own, so I'm glad as least I could go there and have it all taken care of.

Catha came home the next year and met another man and married him after knowing him only a few months when she was eighteen. This time, she wanted a child she could keep and raise herself. She thought marriage was the way for her to become a mother. Catha and her husband had one daughter and stayed married for four years, but her husband drank heavily and beat her up. She called a battered women's shelter and left him. They never obtained a legal divorce but Catha has not seen or heard from him since last Christmas. She and her daughter received public assistance and occasionally, child support. Next year, when her daughter begins school she would like to find a job, but she needs to take her GED test first.

Denise

Denise, 25, had three children over the last seven years, and like Catha, is now separated from her husband. She grew up in an apartment with her mother and four younger siblings. She was a sophomore in high school when she first found out she was pregnant. "I was getting sick", she said, "and I didn't know what the problem was so I told my mother." Her mother didn't wait long. "She just told me to pee in this cup, I asked her why, she said, 'just do it, okay?'" When the pregnancy test confirmed that her daughter was pregnant, Denise's mother went after her boyfriend and forced them to marry:

> She got hold of my ex, Buzz, and told him and said, "hey, she's pregnant, you have to marry her or you're going back to jail." He just got out of jail

> for drugs. My mother threatened him. But she denies it. I know he wouldn't have married me. He tried skipping town but he ended up coming back.

Denise says she lost her friends because she was pregnant, and she knew that her boyfriend was "no good." Her husband was abusive and he was unable to hold a job. Her mother told her "that's what you get" for having sex. She did not want anything to do with either of them. They moved from state to state following any job opportunity Buzz heard about for truck drivers. But since he was drinking and taking drugs, he never kept a job for long. Denise had no work experience and she stayed in motel rooms with her child while Buzz brought his friends over to the room to party. She would wake him up for work and he would yell at her, or when he was drunk he would throw objects at her. After having two more children, she eventually moved back to her home town, but she has a rocky relationship with her mother. She resents that her mother forced the marriage:

> It was rough because we were young and irresponsible. It was so hard with a baby. I knew nothing about him when we married, moved in together, and everything went downhill. I met him at the pool hall. That used to be the hang-out. He's older than me but he had quit school. I think he finished ninth grade and that was it. I guess my mother didn't know what else to do but how could she make me marry him? She didn't even care about what might happen.

Wendy

Another woman, Wendy, 23, also married young because she was pregnant. Both her family and his family counseled them to "legitimize" the child by marrying. While she describes the decision to marry as the wrong one, she says her priorities changed when she became a mother. She stopped being "wild" -- smoking and drinking and

staying up late. She realized that having a baby was an opportunity for her to think about another person and stop focusing on herself. When her husband did not make a similar change in his lifestyle, she divorced him. She finds being a single parent hard, mostly because she faces too many demands on her time:

> Q: Has being a parent been the way you expected it to be?
>
> A: I always expected to have kids but I never thought I'd ever be a single parent. I always thought I'd be married and have a home and a family. I never dreamed of being a single parent. But here I am... he was always complaining about they way I cook and stuff. Not only that, he was gone all day, and didn't always come home at night. I don't know what he does. He doesn't work. He's with his friends all day and all night.

She is working as a housekeeper part-time after leaving her son at day care center in the morning. Wendy likes watching him play with the other children and enjoys the "way little kids think" about the world. "When he makes up a story, it's, like, wow, I never would have thought of that." She finds herself very tired at night because she is always so busy, and she does not have her mother or friends nearby to help her out. "I have a hard time dealing with the day to day things. Working during the day and coming home and taking care of the house and taking care of the kid. It's just a whole lot to deal with by yourself."

Marriage Versus Singlehood

What factors do women consider when they decide to form a family? When I asked women about their plans for themselves when they were young, not one of 50 women said they planned to have a child without a husband. Almost everyone expected to be married in their early twenties, and most planned to have two or more children in their mid-twenties. As one woman put it, "I thought I'd have the house with the garden,

the husband and kids, the white picket fence. You know. It didn't work out that way, but the next best thing is what I have now. I still have a family." As the previous discussion indicates, the women in both the strong and struggling groups planned to be mothers some time, and they had experience taking care of younger siblings or cousins. They did not know what to expect from motherhood but they felt ready for the responsibility. Ideally, they would have formed families with men who wanted to be parents too. Most often, however, they describe their boyfriends as immature, unfaithful, and unemployed. Before marrying, these women looked for any alternatives that would help them stay single and set up independent households. For the "strong" group, this meant relying on families. For the "struggling" group, this meant settling for the men or relying on welfare, since their families were usually too burdened to help them and their new child out.

Those in the "strong" group compared their relationships with their boyfriends to their parents' marriages, and they wondered if they could do better. For those in the "struggling" group, their relationships with their boyfriends reminded them of their parents failed marriages, and they worried that their attempts at marriage would be doomed from the beginning. Some of these women preferred to "take their time" deciding whether their relationship was going to last, and they downplayed the significance of marriage to their boyfriends, who tended to want to marry:

> I am not in a hurry to get married. I'm still young. If this one works, fine. If it doesn't, I'll move on. (Corey, age 21)

> It's a piece of paper. I feel if you love somebody, you don't need a piece of paper. You don't need to change your name. You don't need to go through all of that. It's good for your income tax -- when you make your annual claim. (Roberta, age 35)

> I don't know about marriage... it's a total commitment and we need to be ready. That's your life partner from the wedding until you die, and I just think people say that without thinking about what it actually means. (Ginny, age 27)

Women in the "strong" group had more help with their first (and later) pregnancies, and therefore, they were more likely to remain unmarried. Most of the women I interviewed (in both groups) expressed no regrets about having children, although they admitted it was harder work than they ever imagined. They said that their children kept them "grounded." If they didn't have children, they speculated that they would be drifting -- not only in their jobs, but from boyfriend to boyfriend. Having children kept them thinking about who they invite into the house and what type of person they want them to be around. One woman said, that if she were not a mother, "I probably wouldn't even be here. I'd probably be in a different state living a whole different life."

Most of the unmarried women I interviewed became single mothers by accident. Their pregnancies were not planned -- they "forgot" to use birth control, used an ineffective method, or they didn't think they could get pregnant -- and although they experienced morning sickness and other physical symptoms, some still denied the possibility of pregnancy for several months: "I hoped I had the flu", Margot said.

Eight women in this study also described a quick wedding following news of their pregnancy. Half of this number say they had already been planning to marry the child's father and the date was merely "moved up." The other half married under pressure from their own extended families, the child's father (even in cases where they barely knew each other), and friends. The remaining women weighed their options -- sized up the

relationship with the child's father, consulted with their own parents and friends -- and did not marry him. Among this group, there are two distinct patterns: women who believed they were asserting their independence through having a child out of wedlock, and women who simply felt they had no choice to make. Like Margot, they describe their initial reaction to pregnancy as "shock" and the second as "guilt" for having sex. Carrying out their pregnancy, in their minds, was the mature, responsible, if less convenient, solution to their predicament.

The ability to succeed as a single parent depends on how much assistance family members can offer the mother, and the conditions under which that help is given. The never-married women who "chose" to head families alone were more likely than the divorced and separated women to have support systems in place at the time they became single parents. The "strong" mothers had marketable skills and education, they either had a steady boyfriend or no boyfriend at all, and helpful family members and friends. The "struggling" mothers, by contrast, were less prepared for wage-earning themselves, and their boyfriends and families were more burdensome than comforting (See Figure 12).

Figure 12. Personal and Social Ties

Strong (N=20)	Struggling (N=15)
• college degree or in school • working part-time or full-time • helpful partner or no partner • large network	• not in school • not steadily working • difficult partner • small network

	More than HS education	Working at least part-time	Helpful partner/ child's father	Large network
Strong	17 of 20 (85%)	14 of 20 (70%)	8 of 20 (40%)	11 of 20 (55%)
Struggling	4 of 15 (27%)	5 of 15 (33%)	3 of 15 (21%)	3 of 15 (21%)

As stated earlier the mothers and fathers of the women in my study came of age in the 1950s and 1960s, and most married straight out of high school. It was a time when men in this mill community had access to unionized jobs with on-the-job training and few went to college. Of course, times were not always easy for this generation, and many women describe parents arguing over expenses and bills. But many were able to buy a simple house and some property for themselves and their families. These are the same parents who now share their accumulated assets by offering financial help to their daughters and grandchildren. Sometimes this help is given freely "with no strings attached," and other times there is some negotiation over repayment plans and what behavior is expected in return for their kindness.

Marianne, 26, explained that she lived in subsidized housing project with her four year old son, but did not like its reputation. "People call it 'sin city' because it's full of unwed mothers and fathers. Everything seem to be community property around there. One day my son's tricycle got stolen from out back yard and we found it down the street. They don't think anything of it." She borrows a car from her parents, which she is free to use for driving to school and work -- and to visit them: "My parents live just two miles away so, we go to my mother's every day when I get done school, and in the summer we are always there. He plays out at my mother's and we usually go home around 7:00, just in time to bathe and put him to bed." Marianne credits her father, a car salesman, as being a good male role model to her son: "I'm lucky that my father is around. He takes Michael to the park and they go bowling once in a while. They have a nice relationship --

better than I ever had with him!" She speculates that boys today suffer from the lack of men in their lives.

Although Marianne is careful to tell me that she is independent -- she pays her own bills, makes her own decisions, and does not need their help -- she appreciates the quiet encouragement her parents give her and her son. "If I didn't have them, it would make it a lot harder to finish school. How would I get there? What would I do with Michael when I had to study?" The "little things" that Marianne's parents offer her mean the difference between long-term welfare and work. Although she lives in the subsidized housing complex on the run-down east side of town, she identifies as part of her parent's middle class neighborhood on the "cleaner, nicer" west side.

Twenty-eight year old Lisa is a divorced mother with three children, and she does not have much "free" time. Her ex-husband takes the children on weekends when his schedule permits. His family offers to baby-sit too but she worries that they talk about her negatively to the children when she is not there. Her own schedule is tight right now because she just started a new job as an administrative assistant for a lumber company. She feels fortunate to have a regular full-time work day with benefits, since she knows so many friends who work irregular hours and can only find part-time jobs. But she sometimes finds herself showing a short temper with her children, especially when they are rushed to get dressed and off to school in the morning. Lisa does the dishes and other chores herself because it takes longer to ask someone else to do it. She worries mostly about supervising her children and being a consistent disciplinarian. "I know I'm not always even with the kids. I tend to walk into the situation and start blaming them for

being noisy or arguing. I can't expect them to be good every day. They get tired too." After living in the southern part of the state for several years, Lisa moved closer to home so when she feels overwhelmed, she can call on her child's father and his family:

> He's been taking them more often. It's still not on a regular basis, but he takes them more often now than before. That's because he doesn't have a girlfriend, but you know, I can tell when he has a girlfriend, because it changed. He doesn't see the kids or help with them. Every other weekend, though, they do go to his parents' house and there are six, seven cousins that get together and they sleep over there every other weekend, which is nice. It's a nice break for me.

Moving near home and accepting help is hard for Lisa because she feels like she has made a mess of her life. But she knew that she could not afford to pay for child care and other incidentals all by herself. She will not take money from her family, but she appreciates the evening child care so that she can spend a night or two per month with friends or on a date: "I have my life broken into two different sections. Whether it's healthy or not. Eighty-five percent of my life is me and the kids and the decisions I make, I make considering the kids' needs. Working, doing things for us as a family. The other 15 percent I devote to myself." If Lisa wants to meet someone, she schedules it when the children are not around: "That's only when they're sleeping at night. If I go out once a month or once a week, whatever I decide to do, that's my time. But that's it. I won't start a relationship. I won't involve them in a relationship until I'm more settled."

Lisa's concerns about her time constraints as a single working mother were typical of the women I interviewed. The pattern showed that although they claimed to be able to find someone, usually a family member, to give them a much needed "break" from constant parenting obligations, they have to plan well in advance. Lisa pointed out that

unlike married mothers, there is no one to stay home with the children when she needs to run to the store for milk, bread, and eggs: "I guess it's rare that you get a break and do the things that you would like to do to keep your household together or functioning. I don't like dragging them everywhere, so I don't." For those who were the sole wage earners and parents, the stresses of having children were mostly related to the pressures of time. After an overwhelming day, it was so important to have a grandparent close by or a spouse or their father or somebody that could just take them for little while, just to give their mother some peace of mind. One woman who was taking courses in addition to working, budgeted her income to hire a sitter once a week.

> I have a baby-sitter up here now that I call on Tuesday nights mostly every week. Just to get some extra work done, I can come up to school at night and study. Paying her is all I can do because I can't call anyone else right up and say, "Hey, can you come over and watch the kids?" You know, my sisters are in high school and they are too young.

Other women called their mothers to come over and relieve them for an hour or two in the evening. Most were careful to point out that they did not expect their parents to drop everything because they needed a baby-sitter. And there were usually demands placed on grandparents by other family members too: "Every once in a while, she reminds us that she has raised her kids. We should let her be the grandparent. Which means to let her enjoy them when she want to have them. It works out better for us all that way."

This chapter has described the lives of 20 strong and 15 struggling women at different points in time. When we think carefully about the women who are having a hard time as single mothers, there are patterns in their family, schooling, and work experiences. Their families did not have enough time and money resources to share with

their children. They moved around from place to place depending on available job opportunities for their fathers and mothers. From early adolescence, the women in this group have been faced with adult responsibilities, like caring for younger siblings and contributing to the household income. When they became pregnant, they were unprepared to support themselves and their children, and their parents were in no position to help. The men in their lives often disappeared, and they turned to public assistance to help them make ends meet.

In comparison, the women who are the most successful as single parents have benefited from healthy relationships with their families that ensure ready access to financial and emotional support when needed. When they were in school, their interactions with teachers gave them skills, capabilities and confidence. Their close friendships and romantic relationships have expanded their social networks and helped them develop new ways of handling the challenging situations that accompany single parenthood.

The stories told in this sub-sample of 35 women challenge the popular notion that all single mothers face the same problems. I have demonstrated the variation in how material and nonmaterial resources are accumulated over the life course for the women heading strong and struggling families. The next chapter discusses a group of 15 women who have had little access to resources in their own families, but their connections to community institutions help them cope as parents.

CHAPTER VII

TRANSITIONAL FAMILIES

The last chapter demonstrated how steady resources and stable relationships throughout the course of women's lives provide them with the education, confidence, and skills they need to maintain strong families as single mothers. By contrast, the economic and social disadvantages of growing up in a resource-poor family prevent women from finding the help necessary for them to succeed as single parents. This chapter describes a third group in my sample who overcame the "bad luck" and "disasters" that characterized their childhoods. Like the struggling women, the "transitional" women experienced insecurity early in their lives. But later their relationships with role models -- high school teachers, foster parents, cheer leading coaches, camp counselors, and bosses -- compensated for growing up poor and experiencing other negative childhood events. The adults who intervened sometimes acted as "surrogate parents" at important junctures in the women's lives when they most needed direction or other kinds of aid. Acting much like the strong group's families, these mentors gave young women the support and resources that were absent in their own families. After these women became single parents, they were better able to take advantage of educational, parenting, and work programs in their neighborhoods. Once they were ready, these women found that social institutions were already in place for them in their communities.

What does it take to raise children who will be successful parents, whether they are married or unmarried? In What Money Can't Buy Susan Mayer explores how family

background affects children's life chances, and then compares economic with noneconomic factors. She finds that when family income increases, children's material standard of living improves, but this improvement has little effect on other kinds of well-being, such as educational attainment, labor market success, or becoming a single mother (1997: 14). She warns that family structure and poverty should not be used as substitutes for other unmeasured personal and social characteristics. To trace these other patterns in the childhood experiences of women in the transitional group, I mapped out the background factors that these women had in common. As Table 8 shows, most of the women's parents in this group married when they were quite young, often when the couples were pregnant. Seven of the 15 mothers were under eighteen when they had their first child. The majority of these marriages did not last; ten of the women's parents separated and divorced while raising children under five.

Table 8. Childhood Patterns for Transitional Group (N=15)

	Number	Percentage
Parents Married Young	8	53%
Parents Divorced with Children Under Five	10	67
Parent(s) Abused Alcohol	9	60
Parent(s) Abused Children	6	40
Parents Sent Children to be Raised by Other Adults	6	40
Family Changed Residences Two or More Times	11	73

As a group, these women's parents' marriages were filled with tension, open conflict, physical abuse, and alcoholism, and the women report "unhappy" or "bad" memories of their childhoods. After divorcing, the mothers usually were awarded physical custody of their children, but in six instances they gave up their children to foster care, adoption agencies, or grandparents because they could not (or chose not to) care for their children themselves. Corrine remembers moving from place to place with her mother and her brothers, until they "got taken away" from her mother when Corrine was nine:

> I was born in [another state]. I grew up there for a little bit. Then we moved to [a different state]. It is the town where the projects are, I forget the name. My mother, well, she was 16 when she had my brother, then she had me right afterwards. She married when she was I guess about 20 and I lived with them both when I was younger, up until I was 9, then I was taken away. We were living in a small, a real little place and she left us all alone when she went out. My whole family and I got put in foster homes. I don't know about my real dad. I don't know if my dad died. But my stepfather and mom got married.

The women in this group describe their families in ways that are similar to those in the struggling group, with one exception. The transitional group's parents were more likely to be "absent" from their lives. The mothers in both the struggling and transitional groups grew up poor, and some had a string of bad men or a very bad marriage. But not only did the transitional women's families have few resources, they were also emotionally detached from their children when they were young. In Corey's situation, her parents were young and immature when they got pregnant, and they had problems maintaining their relationship while living in their grandparents' house:

> My mother was fifteen when she got pregnant for me and they decided that they would get married and keep the baby. And then... I really don't know,

> I mean I hear stories, I hear both sides. It's kind of hard, my Dad says one thing and my Mom says the other. But, the view that I get from my mother's side is that she was too young and just couldn't deal. They lived with my Gram after they got married. They got married and lived there and I was born and then, actually the view I got from both sides was that my mom was a jealous person; she thought he was paying attention to other women, and not to her. So they split. And my Gram said to them, "Well, when you move out she's staying here." And it just kind of worked out that way. They moved out and I stayed there.

Corrine and Corey were both raised by people who cared about them, but they resented their "stand-in" parents, and went through a period of resentment and rebellion. Most of the women in this group spent their adolescence "hanging out" with a wild crowd, running around and getting into trouble. There was no one supervising or even looking out for these young teenagers when they first started high school, and the women recall that they were not being held accountable to anyone. They were pushing the limits with their relatives and foster parents. The lack of supervision was not unique to guardianships. Even those women who were raised by their own mothers and fathers describe households in which there was severe alcoholism or the family changed residences so often that they did not feel rooted in any one place. Vanessa, who has one younger brother, moved from one state to another at least five times before she turned twelve:

> My father drove a truck. When I was a kid he used to drive oil trucks, and it was good money. I was born here, but I don't know how long we lived here when I was little. We moved to [a southern state], we lived there in a town called Silver Station, we rented a house for a few years. Then we moved back up here, lived here for a few more years. Then we moved back down because he wanted to go back to work for oil. For a while my father and his brother thought they would start a business together, and they each had their own trucks. That was a while ago. So we moved back for a little while. We moved to this small town and lived in a trailer, I don't remember how long we lived there. I don't remember a whole lot. It

was totally different from here. I remember school was twice as easy down there as it is up here. It was a big change. Then we moved back here.

Vanessa was pleased to move "back here" so she could make lasting friendships. It was hard for her to always be the new student in school, but when she settled for a while in northern New England, she found that all the eighth graders had formed their own social groups and she was not part of the "in crowd." This was hard for her, especially since she had only one sibling and no relatives nearby: "The only thing I liked about school was cheering." She was on the cheer leading squad from fourth grade up to the eleventh grade. "Then in the eleventh grade I was, once again, discriminated against. Because I wasn't in the right clique. I hung out with all the bad burn-out people. Or so they said. But I never went out and partied. That wasn't me."

Table 9. Teenage Patterns for Transitional Group (N=15)

	Number	Percent
Curfews		
Yes	4	27%
No	11	73
Communication		
Open	1	7
Closed	14	93
Finished High School		
Yes	11	73
No	4	27
School Activities		
Yes	10	67
No	5	33

As Table 9 shows, these women did not have smooth or easy relationships with their parents or guardians at home. They interacted little with each other and tended not to "open up" with other members of their family. Ronnie, who lived with her mother after her parents divorced, quit school and left home because she was "fed up" with the hassles:

> I quit school and started hanging out with some people, just didn't want to go home. I felt like I could take on the world, you know. I always could go home, I just didn't want to, I chose not to. Then I met up with this guy and I actually lived on the streets. We had snow drifts coming in the little shack where we lived. We hitchhiked down [another state] a few times. I was in love with the guy, I did whatever he wanted. He was a drifter. He didn't work. He was a thief. He used to break into gas stations and stuff. I hung out with him for three years and it never changed.

Because her mother was troubled and "mean", Ronnie's coping strategy during adolescence was to escape from her parent's house to almost any place else she could stay. She was distracted at school, and she did not expect to go to college, or to have a decent job or a family. Years later, long after children of her own, she returned to an adult education program suggested to her by her case worker at the welfare office. In retrospect, Ronnie says that she knew she had the ability to do well in school but she was not encouraged to take it seriously. As an adult, going back to school "meant something" to her -- she was mature and better able to concentrate.

While "acting out" could have lead them down a destructive path to adulthood, things changed for these women during adolescence. Like Ronnie, many tried to cut themselves off from the chaos of their parents' house, sometimes by putting themselves in dangerous situations. However, most of the women in this sub-sample did not drop out

of school. Relationships with teachers and other mentors were as important as family relationships for most of them. They had likable teachers who motivated them to learn, and they graduated with their class, sometimes making considerable personal sacrifices. Years of research tells us that the longer women stay in school the better their own children's futures are likely to be. But these women were not getting the support they needed from their family and friends. For most women, it was only when they found help through a school counselor, a youth program, a sporting activity at school, or some other caring adult who noticed them. Usually, they were reached by these individuals because they were known to be poor and lacking in family resources.

Stephie, for example, switched schools when she was sent by her mother to live with her father, and she lost her old friends. Her father was rarely at home, and he did not know much about how to raise a child. But, like many of the other women in this group, she found a sport that she liked and it became a mechanism for her to "fit in" at her new school. Before the year was over, she had formed new relationships with her teammates and coach:

> I lived with my mother for about 14 years. But she was sick and for the last ten years she's been in a nursing home with MS. When she got put in the hospital, my stepfather was the only adult left and he didn't have legal guardianship of me. So I was sent to live with my biological father. It was a new school, a new family basically. It took a toll over everything. I got Bs and Cs. I didn't like school at first, but then I started playing basketball and I was good. So I hung around with that crowd mostly.

Ronnie, Stephie, and other women were helped by individuals they met in their schools and communities who did not stigmatize them for growing up poor or in a "bad" family, but instead encouraged them to study, be involved, make friends, and stay in school.

Stephie's basketball coach was the only adult woman she saw on a regular basis. The coach and her husband gave Stephie advice when she was having a hard time at home. They also helped her pay for the cost of her uniform one year, and they watched out for her as she started dating boys in high school.

This section has introduced some of the background factors in the transitional women's lives. They came from troubled families who did not have the time or ability to watch out for them. But it is significant that ten of these women were "reached" during their teenage years by people outside of their families who took an interest in their development, offered friendship, guidance and information that helped them prepare for adulthood.

Personal factors are also at play here. They resisted taking part in the chaos of their families, sometimes they "ran away" and eventually found a "surrogate" parent in a caring adult. These women developed the discipline and determination to survive and achieve before they became single parents. While working towards their goals, they had an "I'll show them" attitude.

Women in this group "found" resources at different stages. The next section describes what is important about the security and resources that caring adults and peers provided, and explains how these women were able to take advantage of community institutions once they believed in their own abilities. Finally, I turn attention to several women who were helped later in life -- after they became single parents and were trying unsuccessfully to balance work and family responsibilities.

Surrogate Parenting for Children

Lisa grew up in a disorganized family. Her mother was married six times over a twenty-year period, and Lisa was sexually abused as a child by one of her mothers' partners. She removed herself from the home of her biological mother at the age of twelve by convincing her grandmother that she needed a safer living environment. After talking to a clergy member at their church, they found a couple who wanted to take her into their home:

> Q: Did you live with your parents when you were growing up?
>
> A: I lived with many people. I was with my Mom until, I'll say both my parents until I was about two, I think and then, I was born in [another state] and then, I think, when I was about two, my mom and I moved to [this state] and I grew up there. She had different boyfriends, husbands. So I was with whoever she was with until I was about twelve years old. I was in and out of homes, she couldn't handle us at one point or for whatever reason, so that, but then when I was eleven, eleven or twelve, I left because I couldn't deal with situations in the house and went to live with a couple from the Church. They took me in. I couldn't handle the situation anymore and the abuse that was within the family, so I said, "Well, I can't do this anymore. I need to go."

Lisa thrived while she was living with the middle-class family who adopted her. She attended a private high school where she received individual attention. Counselors helped her make sense of her new life, and as a teenager, she stayed in touch with her mother, and the sisters and brothers who now lived with her grandmother. She had contact with her biological family but in our interview, she distinguishes between them and her "real" adoptive mother who she says "made me what I am" today.

Lisa did not date much until she met an older man while in her last year of high school. She got pregnant and they married after she graduated. From the very beginning,

the relationship was strained but Lisa tried to make it work, for she was worried that she would follow the same destructive path as her mother. The marriage lasted several years and they had three children before they divorced. Her ex-husband, however, has stayed involved with their three children and most months he pays his child support. Lisa did not work when she was married, and after their divorce, she applied for welfare to help support her children. She was living far from her adoptive family, but they talked on the phone every day and visited frequently. Her adoptive mother suggested that she take a college course in order to prepare for work. Lisa asked her caseworker if the agency could help her learn typing and other secretarial skills so she could find a job.

Two years later Lisa is completing her associate degree in office management. She is a leader in her class, she is doing well at school and looking forward to full-time work. In the absence of family living nearby, Lisa has formed an informal support group for women like herself, who are full-time students and full-time mothers:

> We have a cup of coffee together in the morning before class because most of us get can here a little early. That's easier than staying late. People come and go. I really don't see Anne too much anymore. She's gone. She graduated last year. I mean, we talk all the time but we don't have time to get together. It's just, life is so hectic. Ruth, she lives in the next town which is just like twenty, fifteen minutes up the road. We're close. I see her when I can outside of school. We do the power-shopping thing for therapy, Ruth and I. She'll call me and say "I'm depressed, how about you? We need to go window-shopping." Kris is a real good friend too, you know, it's like, you have people that you meet and you just automatically click with and you bond with and it's like, man, we're so much alike and you just become real close. You know, you can't just do that with everybody, but I have some good friends here.

This friendship network has been helpful for reducing the stress of combining their roles as mothers and students. They plan study groups on the weekends to prepare

for major tests and they organize play groups for their same-aged children. For them, the technical college serves as a place where women can accomplish more than learning new skills to aid in their job search. They also become more independent, self-reliant, and confident as they make important decisions and face the future. Many women who attend this two-year college are non-traditional students. Although welfare workers, relatives or friends may have suggested they give school a try, their decision to enroll in the nearby technical college is the first step they have taken "on their own" as young adults looking towards the future.

As mentioned in previous chapters, there are several qualities that make this college work well for the students who go there. The variety of academic programs they offer are well-suited for the local labor market, they have a good day care center for the children of students, and the teachers are well-connected and active in the community. A learning center for students who are poorly prepared for college eases the transition for many students. They can stop by and use the computers themselves or they can get individualized help with their English homework. Walking through the halls of the technical college on a winter afternoon I saw students and teachers talking in the cafeteria, lively classrooms with the chairs huddled together in circles, and posters advertising hockey games and ski trips for the upcoming holiday break.

Friendship and Mentoring for Teenagers

Vanessa, whose childhood was discussed earlier, now has a daughter and works part-time. She dropped out of school in eleventh grade because she felt "left out" of the social scene at her school; however, her grades were fine. She immediately took and

passed her GED exam with no problem: "I didn't want to be end up working in a factory like my mother. I even actually told her that once. She was kind of mad. But it was true." Soon afterwards, she heard about a job training program through a newspaper advertisement, called them, and signed up. This summer school program was funded by the government and provided additional training opportunities for "needy" teenagers:

> I went to a youth work program when I was 18, at the vo-tech. I read it in the flyers that they send you. They paid us to go to school, it was great. I was going back to that course for the summer, being with people my own age. I thought it was a great opportunity I couldn't pass up, if they were going to pay me to go to school. It was worth it. That's when I started falling out of love with my boyfriend and started working at the nursing home. There was a child care, a forestry group, and I forget what the other one was. We all took classes together in the morning, we had to take math and English and they were all kids that were between 16 and 19. In the afternoon we went to our different classes. It was great, we went on hiking trips. Got paid to go hiking, I was, like, wow, this is fun.

Participating in this program improved Vanessa's cognitive skills and prepared her to pass a certified nursing assistant's examination in the fall, but it also exposed her to new friends and new challenges -- like when she participated in an outward bound project. She no longer worried about wearing the "right" clothes or shoes; people accepted her. She was able finally to hike the mountains, which although they are nearby, she never had a chance to do. For the first time, she discovered what it meant to enjoy school. She admired the teachers for their creativity and openness.

At the time, Vanessa was living with a man several years older than herself. As she gained confidence in her abilities and started making new friends, her boyfriend pressured her to quit the program. He did not approve of her new friends, and he was threatened by her emerging independence: "That's when I realized I wasn't ready to be

settled down after all," Vanessa said. After reflecting on her own interests and talking with the youth counselor, Vanessa decided that she wanted to be a nurse. She chose to keep her new outlook on life and gave up her old relationship.

When Vanessa broke up with her boyfriend and moved out she did not realize that she was pregnant. Six weeks later, she took a pregnancy test, and when she went over to her ex-boyfriend's apartment to tell him, he had already left the state to take a construction job in Florida. Vanessa went on welfare, moved in with a girlfriend, and stopped smoking. She also started to read books from the library about pregnancy and parenthood:

> I read a lot of books. I love to read. When she was born I was strict to the book about what to do and how to raise her. As she got older, you kind of lay back a little about what the book says. When they are first born it is hard because you have never taken care of an infant in your whole life. But it's pretty easy now. Maybe someday she will have a daddy. Hopefully I will meet somebody, but I am in no hurry to meet somebody now, it will just happen. I know it will. Mr. Right will come. Until then, I have Pamela.

The only person Vanessa relied on during her pregnancy was her friend from the summer program, Pamela: "She would bring me crackers at one o'clock in the morning. She was the only one that was really there for me the whole time." Pamela has no children herself, but for the past two years they have lived together and shared responsibilities for housecleaning, cooking, and raising Vanessa's daughter. She acts like a sister to Vanessa and an aunt to her child: "We've lived together for a while now, and we're starting to sound like an old married couple." Without Pam's help, Vanessa would not be able to work at the nursing home. Vanessa starts work at 6:15 in the morning, before her day

care center opens up, so Pamela takes over the morning routine. She feeds, dresses, and drops Vanessa's daughter off at the center in the morning before going to work at the department store in the afternoon.

Having the opportunity to participate in occupational and skill-building programs like JOBS and summer work programs for youth are important for their personal and cognitive development. For the first time, these women see themselves as smart and capable, and they begin to make plans for the future. As Vanessa's story shows, these programs provide them with an opportunity to meet other people who share their goals and they form valuable networks of support.

Continuing Education for Adults

Faith, who is also a student with a three year old daughter, told me about her childhood experiences -- she felt frustrated by her parents' messy divorce which meant that she spent her childhood living in different households. Like Lisa, she wanted to "get out" of the situation but instead, found herself shuffled back and forth from her mother to her father:

> I lived with my parents, both of them, until I was five. Then I lived with my mother. Then I lived with my father until I was about 10. Then when I was 10, I went back with Mom. Then I lived with my Dad for about a year. Then I moved back with my Mom through high school.

Moving from one place to another was her parents' choice; it was out of her control. Faith's father arranged for her to come and live with him and his second wife when he accused her mother of being unfit because she had a new boyfriend. Regardless of which parent she was living with, Faith felt like she was growing up in the midst of chaos. Each time she switched houses, she had to readjust her friendships, her freedoms,

her spending habits, and she tried to "stay neutral" when her parents expected her to choose sides. Although her father had more money and he tried to win her over with gifts, she resisted the urge to let him "buy" her allegiance:

> I guess I come both sides of the track because I have a Dad who always had a salary job. He still makes good money. My younger sister and I never had to worry about anything, as far as my Dad was concerned. But my Mom always struggled to make it. And I've lived with both of them so I kind of understand what it's like to be able to have things you want and then, on the other side of it, I understand what it's like to have nothing. When you get something new, you really appreciate it.

Her father agreed to pay her out-of-state college tuition bills -- until she got pregnant on a "one-night stand" at the end of her freshman year. The child's father did not want her to carry the pregnancy to term. Her father was very upset by her behavior and he "cut her off" -- he told her she could go on welfare "like all the other young mothers do these days." She faced a difficult decision. She wanted to finish college but she thought it was best to move home and try to be a mother. During this time, she was disappointed by her parents' lack of involvement but she had a great deal of support from her dormitory advisor, physicians at the health clinic, and her friends at college. Although they encouraged her to stay in school, she could not afford to continue and she was not confident that she could handle the pressures. As her father made necessary, she turned to welfare to help her get settled into an apartment of her own just a month before the baby was due.

> When I got pregnant, I had my mom saying "do what you want" and I had my father telling me to get an abortion. I had my college friends driving all the way up here to make sure I was okay and that I was doing the right thing. They were all coming to see me because they cared about me. That made a big difference. When you're in high school, you don't really know who you are or anything. When you go to college and something like that happens, then you find out who really cares about you and who doesn't. It

> changes your life completely. Even though my parents were there, they weren't there for me. My friends were my family-type deal. That's what kind of turned my life around, I guess. They helped me decided what to do. My friends made that much of a difference.

Her father did not talk to her for a year, and even now he shows his distaste for her choice by calling her "a welfare mother." Through job training services, Faith continued her college studies soon after she had her son and is now completing an associate degree at the technical college. She hopes to find work as an accountant and, although she is just starting her job search, she has done well at her externships at local businesses. Although she has made new friends, she still keeps in touch with her friends from "away" and she points to them as the reason why she was able to make it through her pregnancy.

Institutions Help When Families Fail

The women in the transitional group were vulnerable children who changed residences, worried about their parents, felt neglected, and grew up too fast. These women remember that the moves and break-ups were particularly stressful for their mothers, none of whom had any marketable skills, and depended instead on alcoholic husbands and abusive boyfriends. Although several dropped out of school, most of these women achieved and graduated, especially when teachers, counselors, and coaches showed an interest rather than stigmatized them. Women like Vanessa, Lisa, and Faith needed supportive, like-minded friends to keep them from making the same mistakes as their own parents. Once they established their own households, and learned about the help available to them, all of these women went back to school with the goal of becoming self-sufficient single mothers.

They encouraged their children's fathers to stay involved with childrearing, even when these men had new girlfriends and fathered more children. Or, they had a best friend who helped with childrearing. Despite the early difficulties, these women are now in a good position to achieve their work and parenting goals. Families "failed" women in the transitional group because parents were unavailable to support, guide, and take care of their children. The women who stayed in school had role models -- people who showed them a different kind of life -- and supportive friendships. These women had found the "right" kind of support elsewhere.

Other women in this group cut off contact and left their families behind at a young age. They followed their parents' example as they experimented with drugs, alcohol, and sex. They had fewer friends, withdrew from sports and social clubs in high school, and passed up opportunities to participate in school activities and youth programs. As one woman said,

> I don't have any role models. I never really did. I just kind of grew up on my own. I pretty much raised myself. Even though my parents were there, they weren't there for me. I never stuck with anything. I would join the band at school, play for a year and then quit.

When these women became pregnant they were alone in their decision, and they viewed motherhood not as the "end of their life" like some of the college-bound women had put it, but as an opportunity for them to change their habits and lifestyle. Another woman, Whitney, visited the health clinic and they helped her to quit smoking pot while she was pregnant:

> I was very honest with my doctors and everything, because that's when I was on pot then and I was having a hard time quitting, even though I was pregnant. And that's why I started seeing the counselor at first, to help me

quit. The bigger I got being pregnant the less I smoked. Towards the end I didn't smoke.

Mothers like Whitney who had decided to change their lives needed help setting goals and priorities. She found this help in the Head Start program in northern New England. The nurse at the family health clinic directed her to the agency. A family service coordinator visited Whitney's home and worked with her to reinforce good habits and to help her maintain greater control over her family life. As the home visitors built trust with Whitney, she worked on making long-term changes in her life. By emphasizing her personal strengths and resources, the family worker helped her to learn more about health and nutrition and built her confidence about being a parent.

Since Whitney lives in a rented trailer in a campground that is somewhat isolated from the activity in town, especially during the winter, her connection with Head Start keeps her informed about other community services, provides a job for her, and makes a major difference in her children's learning abilities. Several mothers work as teacher's aides, driving vans or cooking meals. In each case, the staff knows the family well, and works to involve them in as many activities as possible. Some of the women started working in the mornings while their son or daughter was attending Head Start. Through their involvement, they also meet other single mothers and fathers and build supportive friendships. Whitney now works as a cook in the lunch program four days a week:

> I think it's a very good program. I've been involved for a while now because I have two kids who are in it. I think I first heard about Head Start from the WIC program. They must have told me I qualified and I applied right away because my oldest was almost school-age. But I didn't know there was so much help available for parents too. There are classes and meetings. There's a lot. See, my kids come first before work. And I like this job because I am here when he is here and we come and go together. If I want to, I can even go on the field trips.

Women in the transitional group mentioned two other programs that combine "hands-on" skills and training with a broader approach to learning for older single mothers. Both efforts show the success of community efforts to assist single mothers as they work and raise families. Two years ago, a talented caring teacher and several adult learners in her class started a small business making crafts and selling them to the public. The craft company began as a classroom GED project funded by the county jobs program. At the time, about a dozen women in their twenties and thirties were taking classes together four days a week to prepare for their equivalency exam with the goal of eventually finding work. All were single mothers. As the weeks and months passed, they were getting discouraged by their lack of improvement. Most of them were still reading at a grade school level and their math skills were even weaker. Given their scores on the practice tests, passing the five-part exam seemed unattainable even as a long-term goal.

As the women became friends, they started an informal support group, sharing their worries and frustrations before and after class. Ronnie, one of the older women in the class, used to make crafts at home when her children were young. She brought a bar of scented soap to class one day, and explained how she made it in detail. Their teacher, Alex, began to use the soap ingredients as examples in their math class, and before long, the students wondered aloud if they could make soap as a class work project. As Ronnie explained, "[Our teacher] knew that if welfare sent us out to look for a job in some factory, that we wouldn't stick with it." Over the last two years the soap company has flourished into a small "micro-enterprise" industry that sells all-natural animal-free bars of soap.

With funds from the job training council as well as a private non-profit organization, they came up with a name for themselves and marketed their product. Their work area is located in the first floor of a no-frills factory on a side street near downtown. A sign reads, "We handle each bar of soap as if it was our future." Although business fluctuates, on average they produce about 1,200 bars of soap a week. Last year, they netted $35,000 to $40,000 in sales, and they put every dollar back into the company:

> I can't remember exactly, but we got probably between $8,000 and $10,000 worth of orders at summer fair. The people fill out the order forms right there and we tell them it'll take 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. We come back here, fill the orders, a lot of our stuff goes out COD, the credit card ones gave us their number, but we would never call in and get paid for it until we were ready to ship. Because it's not fair, it's business. We have learned a lot about business. I always knew about this stuff, I guess it was just in my blood, it was nothing new to me, just getting me more organized, because I can never stick with anything. All these women have never done anything like this. The young girls are helping us now and we are teaching them how to run a business, the skills of running it.

This spring the four women who became partners were expecting to begin drawing a salary. Although none has finished their GED yet, they have all found useful and rewarding work.

The same spirited energy that contributed to the success of the soap company is seen in the entrepreneurial network program for rural women which began three years ago. At first, it was merely a dream in the mind of a woman who saw a need for education that helped working age adult women create their own work opportunities. Community development agents worked with bank executives, shop owners, and college teachers to design an applied skills program that would teach "self-starters" how to take care of the nuts and bolts of running a small business. The students they had in mind

were women in the community who already had talent – jewelry-makers, seamstresses, knitters, musicians, typists, and cooks are just a few examples of the range of abilities women interested in this program had already developed on their own. Some of these low and moderate-income women already had a lot of work experience. What they needed was to develop tools for creating their own business. They wanted to know about budgeting, bookkeeping, business communication and management. Once they were accepted into the program, they choose to enroll in a once-a-week program, or they can participate in Saturday seminars and monthly modules.

This new expanded schedule came about because of the large number of women who wanted to be in the program and their changing needs. As Leslie explained:

> In the first year we had a lot of people with just a dream or a fantasy. We had to start and help them build it into a business. This year I think there was a greater proportion of people who already were working at something and they didn't need all of that. They needed bits and pieces. That's part of what the program wants to be is flexible to meet whatever a person in the program tells us they actually need to get them going on their idea.

Leslie, an artist, and now an AmeriCorps volunteer, went through the pilot year of the entrepreneurial program. She first heard about it from Nadine, the director, and a personal friend. "Nadine said, Leslie, you want to have a business. I think you would be interested in this program." So she went to the office and interviewed. "There was this major scary moment when I said, 'Oh my, I am one of a hundred people here. How will I even get in?'" Although there are a limited number of spaces available, the purpose of the screening process is to see whether the applicant's dream or idea is workable in northern New England. "If you want to open a Chinese restaurant, it's not going to work, 'cause we already have three. But we could use a little tea and coffee shop."

Leslie had a good idea that did not require a lot of start-up. She has been drawing and making greeting cards since she was a child, and she wanted to know how to decide how much money to charge for her materials and time. "I started doing nice cards because I wanted presents for people, friends and gifts. I am doing our group's graduation card actually, which I need to finish for next week. Usually if somebody in town has something they want drawn they come to me, because I am kind of the resident artist."

In a period when government assistance has been reduced, these kinds of programs teach women how to help themselves by sharpening the skills and channeling the energy that the participants already have. What they need is the time, motivation, and training to build the organization and confidence that it will take for women who want to continue living in rural areas as self-employed or highly-employable skilled workers. Although it is often crucial for women to live near family so they will benefit from shared resources like housing, child care, and transportation, the economy in rural regions has changed in ways that make it difficult for even well-educated women (and men) to make enough money to pay their bills.

In Within Our Reach, a popular account of successful community programs, Elisabeth Schorr writes: "All families need help from beyond the family, in the form of health services, social support, and education. But for the families whose children grow up at risk, effective social services are even more crucial" (1988: xxviii). These 15 women are "transitional" because they grew up "at-risk" but they developed networks to change their present circumstances and future opportunities. Most have experienced family problems -- alcoholism, prolonged unemployment, physical or sexual abuse --

while they were growing up in their parents' homes. But as adolescents or adults, they formed relationships with mentors who linked them with the community resources they needed, including educational and recreational programs, family planning, and social services. These women also have personal resources, like strength, motivation, and confidence, that helped them manage at school, at work, and as parents. Women in this group have overcome difficult childhoods and adolescence to lead more secure lives as they provide for themselves and their children.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

My study began with two goals. The first was to describe how rural working-class women make choices about marriage and children; and the second was to explain how female-headed households cope with family and work responsibilities. I wanted to learn more about association between family structure, poverty, and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Although social critics and politicians lament the decline of the family (see Popenoe, Elshtain, and Blankenhorn 1996), my research shows that families, along with friends and community institutions, are sensibly and effectively supporting today's single mothers. This chapter summarizes key research findings about the strengths and vulnerabilities of mother-only households and makes suggestions for further study of working-class families.

In earlier chapters I looked at a wide range of resources that women have access to over their life course, including financial assets from families, acquired skills and capabilities, ways of handling new or challenging situations, and support available from relatives and friends by request. When we define resources more broadly, there are differences between those female-headed families who are successful compared to those who are "in-between" or struggling. Income, for example, influences how well mother-only families manage their households, but supportive parents and other stable adults also contribute to young women's lives as they prepare for motherhood and work. In many cases, adult education programs, training, and work opportunities transform women's

future plans and later achievements. I conclude this dissertation with a brief review of its findings and suggest areas for future research that may increase our sociological understanding of family resources and relationships.

Who Are Mothers' Helpers?

To provide a historical and comparative context for my own data, I looked at ethnographies of working-class families in the United States after World War II. These studies give vivid descriptions of men's and women's work lives, extended family and community ties, and the role of women in marriages. Although most discussions of these families highlight the traditional male-centered model, I argue that modern working-class families more closely resemble the middle class in their values of personal responsibility and achievement. They parallel the lower class in their emphasis on interdependence and kinship.

Many single women worry about how they are going to support and care for their children. Over the last few years, the proportion of poor female-headed households reached over 40 percent for rural regions, and 38 percent for urban cities. The economic and demographic explanations for changes in family structure weigh negative and positive consequences of single motherhood. Evaluating the effects of single motherhood is difficult because most existing research has focused on young teenage mothers, and we know less about nonmarital fertility and childrearing by white poor and working-class adult mothers.

Both poverty and family researchers have found links between family structure and economic opportunities (Lichter and McLaughlin 1995; Mare and Winship 1991).

Some scholars concerned with recent increases in divorce and out-of-wedlock births emphasize that low-income and working-class men are having a more difficult time finding high-wage work, and thus are less attractive as marriage partners for women (Duncan and Hoffman 1991; Parcel and Menaghan 1994). Others suggest that single working women are earning enough that they can choose independence over marriages to difficult spouses (Goldscheider and Waite 1986; Hertz and Ferguson 1997). Several researchers argue that public welfare and social support from extended family members offer women this kind of freedom and autonomy (Stack 1974; Edin 1993; Polakow 1993; Rank 1994). Finally, there are those who stress changes in norms and values about family formation and family responsibilities (Cherlin 1992; South and Tolnay 1992; Thornton 1995).

My study suggests that each of these explanations is useful, but only when women's decisions about children and marriage are examined in the context of their entire life histories. Many single women with children are at a high risk for poverty before they ever become pregnant; it is not family structure itself that presents a problem for themselves or their children (see Haveman and Wolfe 1994; McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). Other single mothers, especially those who become pregnant by choice, are doing well as parents despite being unmarried.

Unlike previous research that considers either the causes or the consequences of single parenthood, this study has examined the context, choices, and coping strategies of adult white women heading households. I argue that the reasons women form single-parent households, and their subsequent social and economic position, are closely related.

Women's options for maintaining their families as single mothers are strongly affected by the distribution of resources inside their extended families and the availability of helping networks outside their families. Despite decades of research on the family, we still have limited understanding about how economic, social and cultural factors affect adult women's decisions about marriage and childbearing, and there is little research showing how women in female-headed households cope with family and economic responsibilities. Because of the cumulative effects of hardship, I wanted to examine how both the mothers and their families were currently managing in their households.

The results of my study show that 20 women benefited from early financial investments from their own steadily employed parents who owned their home and raised a large family. Their early years were relatively trouble-free and as children they were integrated into school, both academically and socially. As adolescents, they were supervised and guided by adults. "Strong" families were headed by women who finished high school and had work experience before getting pregnant. Although many of them gave birth out of wedlock, they were well prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood. Moreover, they had the emotional support and financial help of their families, friends, and sometimes, their partners.

Fifteen other women grew up in families that had a difficult time making ends meet, either because two parents had low-wage work or there was a single earner in the household. These women found it hard to finish school, often because they moved from place to place or they were burdened from pressures at home. When they were teenagers, there were no adults who showed a special interest in them. Their friends, like

themselves, were unsupervised or living on their own. When these women became pregnant, they were less prepared for parenthood and had few relatives in a position to provide support. Some of these "struggling" women married their children's fathers because it was the "only thing to do" while others turned to public assistance.

Another fifteen women are "transitional" because they had insufficient family resources as children but they were guided by teachers, church members, social workers, or others in the community who helped them connect with school, work, and parenting programs that made a real difference in their lives. These women experienced problems in their families, including alcoholism, physical or sexual abuse, or severe poverty as children. But as teenagers and young adults, they formed relationships with adults who stood-in as parents by showing interest, listening, giving advice or directing them to community resources (Rhodes and Hoey 1994; Rubin 1997). Women in this group overcame difficult periods during their youth to lead more secure lives as parents. Face-to-face relationships and effective institutions in this small rural place provided these individuals with opportunities for support and growth.

The three subgroups identified among working-class single mothers in this community are instructive. I have pointed out factors influencing the accumulation of resources over the life course by tracking the families of origin, employment, education, social networks, and current primary relationships of 50 women in my sample. This analytic approach led me to compare how working-class women accumulated resources at different times. The strong, struggling, and transitional groups varied in terms of their security, opportunities, and independence. The next section discusses findings about how

these women view men, marriage, children, and relationships in the late 1990s.

Findings about White Working-Class Single Mothers

Work opportunities, values, and family structure have changed in northern New England over the past generation. Marriage no longer brings the economic security and emotional support for mothers and their children that it once offered members of the working class. Both married-couple families and one-parent families now depend on multiple sources of income and a complex web of social relationships to support their households. In addition to their own wages, the single mothers in my sample rely on their partners' earnings, help from their parents and relatives, child support payments, and public assistance. Surplus food, clothing, and other items borrowed from family help them meet the day-to-day responsibilities of running a household. Child care relief and emotional comfort come mainly from friends, partners, and relatives. Some women also benefit from community institutions that perform these same functions. Resources necessary for raising children can come from a variety of sources. Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Jane Mosley (1996) reports that the well being of children is determined by amount of income in the household, not by where it comes from. My research shows that it is the steadiness of material and non-material resources that makes it possible for single parents to provide an environment as healthy and secure as their (usually) married parents gave them as children.

Changing patterns in marriage and childbearing have been visible in American society since World War II (Cherlin 1992, Lichter 1995; South and Tolnay 1992). Men and women are marrying later, frequently living together, often divorcing, and sometimes

remarrying. Childbearing out-of-wedlock is also increasing, especially among white adult women. The rise in divorce and nonmarital childbearing means a growing proportion of families with children are headed by a single parent for some period of time, and, as mentioned earlier, these households are much more likely to feel strain than two-parent families (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994). In the 1960s and 1970s, many families believed that the nuclear family model was the best way for adults to demonstrate their commitment to each other and that having two married parents was necessary for childrearing. Today, families have become diverse and their duties have grown more flexible. Some of my study women are coping better than others as single parents because they have jobs that provide them with enough money to pay their bills. They also have effective parenting skills, adequate child care, and strong networks of support in their families and communities. The mothers in my sample tell varied and interesting stories about their families of origin and their own newly formed households, and they give us an insider's perspective on their social world. As children, these women turned to their parents and relatives for security and guidance. When they were teenagers and young adults, many looked to teachers and friends for reinforcement and support. Now, as adults, these single mothers are combining resources from their families and networks with their own earnings to maintain a household.

Although the mothers I interviewed grew up in marginal or working-class families, they are raising their children with the same values and expectations that their middle-class neighbors hold. Like most women receiving welfare, the divorced, separated, and never married mothers in my sample are mostly working part-time to

support their children, and many are going back to school to expand their employment opportunities. Single mothers also seek assistance from family, friends, and boyfriends as well as the state government to make ends meet. They need child care for their children while they are at work; single mothers who work during the day are using community-based child care centers while those working evenings and weekends more commonly rely on kin-based child care. Some women have nobody to baby-sit when they need a break or when they unexpectedly are called to work.

This research suggests that today's working-class families are different from their parents' generation, but they are no worse off. Children are being raised successfully in more diverse family forms in the 1990s. There is little difference between the economic standing of those in my sample who had married and those who had not. Sometimes, the women who have never been married have more trusting, less conflicted relationships with the fathers of their children, and these men are more likely to trust the ways mothers spend child support payments, and not argue about visitation, compared to those who have been through divorce battles. Steady, loving relationships are good for children but constantly arguing married parents can not provide a healthy environment.

Some argue that nonmarital childbearing, and current upward trends in marriage and divorce, must be reversed in order for families to be secure and for children to become well-adjusted adults (Popenoe, Elshtain, and Blankenhorn 1996). The evidence presented here challenges such assertions. Rural working-class women and their relatives present a new picture of how single parent families can be effective. These findings have important implications for those who care about how today's families get by in our

economy. While some would have given up on the women and families who are struggling, public and private community-based programs are ready to help families educate their children and earn a living. The data from 50 northern New England women suggest that families operate the way we have always expected them to work. Security is important during childhood, and when parents invest in their children at particular life junctures -- early education, the transition to high school and early adulthood -- it is possible for single parents to be "strong" as well. Families with adequate material resources are better able to be resilient in other ways too, and parents with steady work histories have acquired more financially to offer their children in times of need. In many ways, these working-class families resemble those of the middle class. Support and security has long been associated with marriage, but the majority of mother-only families in this study are finding these resources outside of traditional marriage. Most of the single mothers in this study are managing well because they do have helpful families and community support.

The current generation of working-class white women are making choices and decisions that are different from their mothers. They have higher expectations for work and education and they are more independent from the men in their lives. When they cannot "make it" on their own, these divorced, separated and never married mothers turn to their families first. They depend more on their parents, relatives, and communities than on "the state" for assistance. Women rely on their families for financial and emotional support, and they benefit from living in close proximity to their parents and siblings. In circumstances where women cannot turn to their own relatives, some are

seeking out education and training that expands their social networks by improving their job opportunities and increasing their self-confidence. In this place, good community institutions like health clinics, churches, and child care centers make combining work and family possible for all the women in this study.

My research gives a clearer understanding of how hard-pressed families cope and what factors contribute to their security. The study provides data on single mothers' assessment of the local labor market, and the availability of public and private assistance in the community. While much of the national debate and concern for single parent families focuses on minority neighborhoods in large cities, this study provides new insight into white rural families and communities. It also contributes to a fuller understanding about the causes and consequences of family changes, revealing the characteristics that cross household and social class boundaries.

Suggestions for Future Research

Sociologists lately have been interested in pointing out the vast array of problems associated with "broken" families. We are now well informed about the disadvantages children face when they grow up in unfavorable settings and circumstances. By studying the families maintained by white working-class single women, I have been able to further this discussion by moving it beyond family structure and poverty to examine specific family and community resources that help or hinder women's ability to manage as a single parents. I have suggested that women from resource-rich families have accumulated work skills, independence, and confidence at different phases of their lives, while women from resource-poor families have been constrained by their families and

have faced limited opportunities over and over again. A useful way to think about families may be as a series of interdependent relationships that lead us steadily from childhood through adulthood. Rather than separating their "families of orientation" from "families of procreation," the women in my sample believe that their family arrangements are more fluid than these separate terms imply.

By focusing on the working class, I learned that young women are responding to changes in work opportunities and values that allow more choices, freedom and independence than their mothers experienced, although they resist the middle-class label of feminism (Rubin 1976, 1994). They complain that there are no "good men" but they are unsure about why they reject marriage, and they insist that the traditional nuclear family was a "better way" to raise children. I have argued that rural single mothers are an important subgroup to examine because they make up a significant proportion of women heading households. Future work should examine the experiences of middle- and upper-class single mothers as they make decisions about men and relationships without the pressing financial worries as the women in my sample. New studies will improve our understanding of the complex relationships between childbearing, work and family as these issues lead us into the next century.

The point of this research is not to argue for a particular policy or program as the answer to the problems related to single motherhood in rural areas. Instead, I have attempted to show how working-class women rely on their families when they can do so, and they depend on their communities when there are insufficient family resources to help them cope. Much of the training and preparation for being able to succeed as a

single parent begins early in a woman's life. As shown in the comparison of strong and struggling families, large families in this group tend to be more instrumentally supportive than smaller families. Work experience also gives teenagers ideas about what they would like to do for a career in the future in addition to instilling confidence in their abilities and discipline in their habits. The discussion of transitional families demonstrated that role models at school or at after-school jobs mean that there is another adult watching out and giving advice. Those who had lived in the community for a long time were doing better than the newcomers. Institutions can help when families fail, especially in this small rural place where people tend to trust their political leaders and get along with their neighbors.

The relationships women forge with male partners after finishing school and starting work seem to represent a more egalitarian division of labor. Living together is a common way of "getting serious" with a man but even long-term cohabiting couples keep their money separate and work out the "ground rules" for being involved with their biological children. Few mothers are in a hurry to marry. Many women heading families rely on their parents more than any partner, their child's father, or any other family member. The women whose mothers live nearby report (with gratitude) that they "do not know what they would do" without their support. For the most part, mother-daughter relationships improved as they matured. Many see each other every day, and some young women teach their own mothers how to adjust to changing gender roles that are affecting all ages. These daughters learn from their parents' example how to provide for and raise their children. The women in my sample agree that forming lasting relationships with

men seems harder than when their parents were in their twenties a generation ago. Marriages fail, and when these decisions are made when young or in a hurry, they are even more likely to end up in divorce. Each of the women gave me examples of "dysfunctional" relationships within their circle of family and friends.

Most people think that single mothers are all poor and struggling, but this research shows that some mother-headed families are managing well. These women gather together the same resources -- financial security, adequate supervision, caring adults -- to provide structure, routine, and protection for children that the nuclear family is expected to give children. Women form friendships through their children, and some women meet other parents who are just like themselves. Supportive connections for single parents are reinforced and rebuilt as information networks in small towns where people know each other and look out for their friends and neighbors.

In short, this means that women have more financial independence and freedom than their mothers did, and the romantic relationships that they forge later, when they have already become mothers, tend to be mature and fulfilling. Most people seem to think that changes in family structure translates to a decline in values, but this study shows these shifts may be replaced by family and community resources that share the responsibility for parenting and raising children. These new practices have come to represent a major shift in women's roles and social position.

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PROFILES OF WOMEN

The following pages provide brief demographic characteristics and descriptions of the household situation of the 50 women whose stories are told in this study. To ensure confidentiality, all have been given pseudonyms and minor details of their work histories have been changed to protect their identity in the communities where they live. These interviews were conducted in 1995 and 1996.

Strong Group:

1. *Patti,* age 31, has two children and has been divorced for several years. She completed an associates degree last year, and works full-time as an academic tutor at a local community college. Patti has worked in factories, in nursing homes and clothing stores. When she was growing up, her father worked as a sheetrocker and her mother cleaned houses. Neither of her parents finished high school. After her mother died, Patti helped raise her two younger brothers. Patti shares legal custody of her children with her ex-husband, but she has primary physical custody. She is not dating now.

2. *Maura,* age 39, has three children, and is divorced. Her ex-husband died last year. Maura is returning to school to earn an associates degree after working at an optometrist's office for ten years, and she has also sold real estate as a part-time job. Maura plans to begin a career as a child care specialist next year after finishing her certification requirements. When she was growing up, her father managed a produce shop and a car dealership. Her mother was a homemaker and later worked as a school secretary. Her

parents divorced after many years of marriage. She is not dating and has no plans for remarriage.

3. *Elaine*, age 31, has two children and is separated from her husband. Elaine has earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts and she manages the campground where she lives. When she was growing up, Elaine's parents were teachers and they also published a local newspaper; they divorced when she was seven. After finishing college Elaine married and moved near her husband's family. He works for an environmental agency. She and her spouse are resolving their marital problems and she hopes he moves back to the household soon.

4. *Ginny*, age 27, has one son and has never been married. Ginny has a bachelors degree in counseling and she works in the mental health profession. Next year she would like to enroll in a part-time masters degree program. Ginny's parents divorced when she was a child, and her father moved away. She grew up with one sister and her mother, both of whom worked in a factory. Ginny and her long-time partner live together. They have no plans to marry but she describes their relationship as serious, and he is involved in childrearing.

5. *Olivia*, age 29, has never been married and has one son. She has a bachelors degree in social studies and works as a preschool administrator. When she was growing up, her father worked as a purchasing agent and her mother went back to college and became a

counselor. She has four siblings. Olivia expects to stay with her current job, and although she is not currently dating, she would like to marry someday. The father of her child is not involved in their lives.

6. *Sophie*, age 27, is divorced with two children. She graduated from high school and has worked in a supermarket and as a camp counselor. Now she works as a manager at a fast food restaurant. When she was growing up, her father was a truck driver and her mother sold cosmetic supplies. Sophie is the youngest of three children. She would like to attend college someday but is waiting until she has more time and money to pay for it. Her ex-husband lives in another state and pays child support. She recently got engaged to another man and they are hoping to purchase a home near her parents.

7. *Betty*, age 25, has two sons and has never been married. She has an associates degree and is currently employed as a full-time secretary and as a part-time cashier. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a seamstress and her father was employed at the local mill. Betty has six brothers and sisters, most of whom live in the same region of the state. She purchased a home with the father of her children but they do not live together. She has no immediate plans to marry.

8. *Rose*, age 27, is divorced with two children. She is finishing her associates degree and has recently completed an internship in business. She is looking for employment as a bookkeeper. Rose has worked as a hairdresser and as a hotel receptionist. Rose's parents

divorced when she was young. Her mother worked as a waitress and her father was in the air force and also worked as a floorer. The father of Rose's children pays child support and lives nearby. She is engaged to her current boyfriend and plans to marry soon. They expect to buy a house and stay in the area.

9. *Carrie*, age 29, has two children and has been divorced twice. She completed her associates degree and works as a receptionist for a paint company. Carrie has also worked as a waitress and an office manager. Her mother sold cosmetics and her father was a painting contractor. Carrie shares custody of her oldest child with her ex-husband. She has been dating another man for several years and they are living together in an apartment. They are serious, although they have no immediate plans to marry.

10. *Agnes*, age 21, has one son and has never been married. She graduated from high school and attended cosmetology school. She works full-time as a hairdresser and part-time as a supermarket clerk. When she was growing up, her father was employed at the mill, and her mother was a nurse. Agnes has a friendly relationship with her child's father but they are not seriously dating each other. She expects to move to another region in the next few years.

11. *Jane*, age 34, has one daughter and has never been married. She graduated from high school and works as an office manager for a medical office. After her parents divorced, Jane and her sister were raised by her mother. Her mother worked as a nurse and her

father worked as a draftsman. Jane recently split up with her longtime partner but they continue to share custody of their child. She is now beginning to date.

12. *Madeline*, age 28, has two children and has never been married. She is enrolled in an associates program in human services, and works in a residential home for disabled adults. When she was growing up, her mother cleaned offices and worked in a factory and her father was employed at the mill. Madeline has also worked in factories and at fast food restaurants. She has one sister who lives in another state. She and the children's father have been seriously dating and they may move in together next year and marry someday.

13. *Hannah*, age 29, has a daughter and a son. Her divorce has recently become final, and she is now living with her fiancé. She completed an associates program last year, and is now working as a receptionist for a lumber company. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a nurse and her father had a newspaper delivery business. Hannah has one older brother who lives in another state. Someday she would like to pursue a career as a teacher or as a writer. Hannah is engaged to a man she has been dating for two years and they recently purchased a home.

14. *Linette*, age 30, has two children and has never been married. She graduated from high school and completed one year of college. She has worked as a secretary for a number of years, and recently starting working at the hospital. When she was growing

up, her mother was a phone operator and her father was employed as a cabinet maker. They divorced when she was a teenager. Linette is the youngest of seven siblings, many of whom still live in the area. She has a cordial relationship with the father of her children but the are no longer dating each other. He pays child support and visits them on a regular basis. She would like to begin dating again.

15. *Margot*, age 32, is divorced with one daughter. She completed an associates degree in nursing and would like to return to college to earn a bachelors degree. She works at the health care center. When she was growing up, her parents owned and managed a small family grocery store. Margot is the oldest of three siblings, and they live near each other. She does not maintain a relationships with her child's father and he does not pay child support. She is not currently dating.

16. *Missy*, age 27, is divorced with one son. She graduated from high school and completed one year of college. She worked in retail sales before finding a job as a technician in a pharmacy. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a waitress and later as a nurse, and her father was employed as a cook. Her parents divorced when she was young and she and her brother were raised by her mother and stepfather. Missy and ex-husband are good friends; he pays child support and he is involved in raising their son. She is dating a man, but the relationship is not serious.

17. *Roberta*, age 36, is divorced with two children. She graduated from high school and attended one year of college. She works as a bookkeeper for a car dealership. When she was growing up, her mother worked in the textile mills and her father was employed at a restaurant. Roberta and her ex-husband are cordial, and although she has primary physical custody, he visits the children and pays child support. She is not currently dating.

18. *Chris*, age 28, is divorced with one daughter. She has held a number of jobs, including a position as a waitress, a caterer, and now she works as an accountant. When she was growing up, her mother was an office assistant for a printing shop, and her father was a newspaperman. Chris and her ex-husband live near each other and he pays child support. He has weekly visits with their child. She is starting to date but not seriously.

19. *Marianne*, age 26, has one son and has never been married. She is finishing her final year of an associates degree in nursing. She has worked in science labs and as a nursing assistant. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a hairdresser and also held part-time odd jobs, while her father cared for their small farm and later worked at the mill. He is now working for a car dealership. Marianne has primary physical custody of her child and the child's father pays child support. She is not currently dating.

20. *Polly*, age 23, has one daughter and has never been married. She recently completed a certified nursing assistant program and she works at a nursing home. She has also held

jobs as a waitress and as a child care attendant. When she was growing up, Polly's mother was a nurse and her father was employed as a plumber. Polly plans to continue on her current career path, although she sometimes considers opening her own licensed child care center. She lives with her boyfriend and he is involved in rearing their daughter and his son.

Transitional Group:

21. *Lisa*, age 28, is divorced with three children. She is currently enrolled in her last year of an associates degree program; she edits the yearbook and serves as class president. She would like to operate her own business after she finishes college. Lisa has worked as a secretary, a waitress, and in odd jobs. When she was growing up, her mother held several jobs in factories and her father was a drywall worker. The youngest of three children, Lisa lived with her grandmother and an adopted family while she was growing up. Lisa's ex-husband pays child support, and sometimes visits with the children; she is dating but is not currently involved in a serious relationship.

22. *Deborah*, age 22, has one child and has never been married. She is beginning an associates degree program. Deborah has worked as a department store clerk. Both of her parents worked in factories; her mother as a stitcher and her father as a foreman. Deborah spent a lot of time with her father when she was growing up because her mother worked the day shift and her father worked in the evenings. She has three older step-sisters and one younger sister. Deborah's goal is to finish her nursing degree and find employment

in a local hospital. The father of Deborah's three-year old daughter visits them occasionally but they are not in a relationship. Deborah would like to meet a man to marry in about five years.

23. *Marty*, age 29, is divorced with three children. She is currently finishing her last year of an associates degree program and is learning how to fix computers. She plans to hold a full-time job and write science fiction stories in the future. When she was growing up, her father was employed in the navy and her mother was a homemaker before her parents divorced; now her mother works as a floater in a mill. After finishing high school, Marty worked as a clerk in a supermarket and married at nineteen. Marty has two younger brothers. Her ex-husband lives in another state and they have no contact with him. She dates occasionally but is not involved in a serious relationship now.

24. *Faith*, age 21, has one daughter and has never been married. She is currently finishing her last year of an associates degree program and is studying to be an administrative assistant. Faith has worked as a waitress in restaurants. She completed an accounting internship and hopes to find full-time employment next year. When she was growing up, her father worked at the mill, and after a brief stint in the army, her mother took a job in a factory. Faith has three younger brothers and sisters. The father of her children sees them on a regular basis; Faith is now seriously dating another man and although they do not expect to marry she predicts they will be together for a long time.

25. *Whitney*, age 29, has two children and has been divorced twice. She graduated from high school and works as a cook for a child care center. Her father is employed as a machinist, and her mother has worked part-time at a deli counter. Whitney has four siblings who live in the area. She enjoys her current job, and has no plans to return for an advanced degree. The father of her children do not see their children or pay child support; she is not currently involved in a romantic relationship.

26. *Michelle,* age 22, is pregnant with her third child. She graduated from high school and trained as a certified nursing assistant. She now works at a local nursing home. Her mother was a garage attendant and her father served in the navy, and later was employed at a nuclear power plant. Michelle's parents divorced when she was young and her mother is disabled. She is currently living with her partner, who works as a cook and is involved in raising their children.

27. *Kathleen*, age 28, has three daughters and has never been married. She graduated from high school and trained as a certified nursing assistant. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a home health nursing assistant, and her father worked in the mill. When her parents divorced, Kathleen and her three sisters lived with their grandparents. She has worked as a waitress, a hairdresser, and a nursing assistant, but she plans to stay home while her children are very young. Kathleen lives with a longtime partner, and they share housework.

28. *Wendy*, age 26, is divorced with one son. She graduated from high school and works as a housekeeper in a hotel. When she was growing up, her mother worked part-time at a nursing home and her father fixed typewriters for an office products company. Her child's father is not involved in their lives, but they see him occasionally around town. She is not currently dating, and does not expect to marry again.

29. *Linda*, age 28, has one daughter and has never been married. She dropped out of high school in her senior year and studied for a General Educational Development certificate. She has worked in retail sales and for a catering business. When she was growing up, her mother worked in a restaurant and her father worked in a cannery. Her parents divorced, and Linda and her two sisters lived with her mother and grandparents. Linda does not have contact with her child's father and he does not pay child support. She is not currently dating, but would like to marry someday.

30. *Yvonne*, age 22, has one daughter, and has never been married. She graduated from high school and completed one year of college. She has worked at a nursing home and in a hospital cafeteria. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a secretary and her father was a salesman. They divorced when she was young and they split custody so Yvonne and her brother lived with both parents at different times. Yvonne and her ex-husband and not on good terms but he does pay child support. She is engaged to another man and they are living in his house. They plan to marry next year.

31. *Cecile*, age 25, has one son and has never been married. She graduated from high school and worked at an amusement park and at retail sales. She now babysits part-time and is home-schooling her child. When she was growing up, her mother worked at a factory and her father worked for a delivery company. Cecile is friendly with her child's father and he is involved with childrearing decisions and he pays child support. She is not currently dating.

32. *Vanessa*, age 22, has one daughter and has never been married. She graduated from high school and completed her certified nursing assistant program. Vanessa has worked at an amusement park and as a clerk in a grocery store. She now is employed at a nursing home. When she was growing up her mother worked at a supermarket cashier and her father was employed as a truck driver which took him away from home for long periods. Vanessa has one sister. She has no contact with the father of her child and he does not pay child support. She is not dating.

33. *Jenny*, age 21, has one daughter and has never been married. She graduated from high school and works at a local supermarket. Jenny grew up living with her mother who worked in a factory and her stepfather who worked at the mill. Jenny hopes to complete a training program and find full-time employment as a certified nursing assistant. She and her child's father are seriously dating and are may move into an apartment together this year.

34. *Ronnie*, age 39, has three children and has never been married. She is completing her GED and is involved in starting her own small business. Ronnie grew up living with her mother who worked as a waitress and as a housekeeper. Her children's father is not living nearby and does not pay child support. Ronnie lives with her long-time boyfriend and his son. They have no immediate plans to marry.

35. *Brigitte*, age 35, has three children and is widowed. She has her GED and has worked in hotels and restaurants. She is currently employed as a personal care attendant. Brigitte's father worked for a construction company, and her mother worked as a housekeeper. Her parents divorced and her mother trained to become a nursing assistant. She and her siblings moved north with their mother. Brigitte has a dream of opening a coffee shop and is trying to secure a bank loan. She is dating but not seriously.

Struggling Group:

36. *Frances*, age 32, is separated with three children. She left high school at fifteen and completed a GED program and is now beginning an associates degree program taking foundational courses. When she was growing up, her father was disabled and her mother was a housekeeper. In the past Frances has waitressed and painted houses, but she has not ever held a full-time job. She would like to work in an office in the area. Although they do not see him often, her ex-husband still has a good relationship with Frances and their children. She has been seriously dating a man for a year now and they would like to marry after her divorce becomes final.

37. *Larissa*, age 31, has three children and is separated from her second husband. Larissa is enrolled in her second year of an associates degree program. Since she has always had trouble with school, Larissa is seeking special help in her courses. She hopes to become a certified nursing assistant next year. When she was growing up, Larissa's mother worked as a housekeeper and a waitress, and her father was often away from home working as a long-haul truck driver. She has two younger siblings. Larissa has given up trying to resolve their marital difficulties and is in the process of divorcing her husband.

38. *Denise*, age 25, is separated with three young children. She recently completed her GED and occasionally works part-time as a personal care attendant. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a fast food clerk, and her father worked as a welder. Denise has two younger brothers. They ran a farm stand when they were younger. Her ex-husband does not participate in their lives and they have no contact with him. She is the process of divorcing her husband and is consulting a pro bono lawyer. Denise expects to stay in the areas but she has no specific career goals. She is not dating.

39. *Stephie*, age 22, has two children and has never been married. She is enrolled in GED classes and has one more test to complete. Stephie has worked at a fast food restaurant in the past but is not currently employed. Stephie's parents were not married; she was raised by her mother and her mother's longtime partner. Her mother worked in

factories and department stores, and her father was in the navy. Stephie is no longer dating the father of her children, but they see him occasionally and he is required to pay child support.

40. *Penelope*, age 29, has five children and has never been married. She graduated from a vocational high school. She has worked at a factory and at a kennel, but has not worked since having children. Penelope's mother also worked in a factory and her stepfather worked in a mill. Her parents divorced when she was young and she and her sister and brother grew up with her mother and stepfather. She does not have contact with the fathers of her children and she is not currently dating.

41. *Corey*, age 21, has two children and is separated from her husband. She graduated from high school and works as a baby-sitter. When she was growing up, her mother worked part-time as a sales clerk and her father worked at the mill. She lived with her retired grandparents most of her adolescence. Corey has worked as a waitress and as a sales associate for a retail chain. She and her husband are in the process of divorce.

42. *Catha*, age 36, has one daughter and is separated from her husband. She dropped out of high school at fifteen and passed her GED examination. She has worked at a car wash, and at a factory, but is now a stay-at-home mom. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a night manager for a 24 hour convenience store, and her father was in the merchant marines. They divorced when Catha was young. She has one brother who lives

out of state. She and her husband have a volatile relationships and she is not sure whether they will stay together in the future.

43. *Winny*, age 34, has four children and is divorced. She dropped out of high school and completed her GED right away. She works as a part-time housekeeper and is looking for full-time employment. When she was growing up, her mother worked at a shampoo factory, and her father was an electrician. Winny is one of the youngest of seven siblings, and they are scattered among several states. She and her boyfriend share an apartment and they hope to marry over the next few years.

44. *Lori*, age 35, is divorced with two children. She is enrolled in an associates degree program and just completed a secretarial internship. Although she has worked as a waitress, she hopes to find a full-time job working in an office. When she was growing up, her mother was a department store clerk and her father worked in the mill. Lori and her ex-husband have split physical and split-legal custody of their children. Lori has been dating another man for a year and they are serious about their relationship.

45. *Clara*, age 24, has one son and has never been married. She graduated from high school and has worked in fast food restaurants and factories. She is now unemployed. When she was growing up, her mother worked as a housekeeper and her father was a carpenter. She does not date the father of her child and he does not pay child support. They sometimes see each other around town. She is not currently dating.

46. *Julia*, age 25, has two children and has never been married. She graduated from high school and worked for an answering service and at a nursing home. When she was growing up, her mother worked in a shoe factory and her father worked for a computer company. Her parents divorced when she was young and she and her brother lived with both her parents are different times. Julia's oldest child's father pays child support and is involved in his life; her current partner is the father of her younger child; they have been dating for a year and are living together.

47. *Felicia*, age 23, has two children and has never been married. She graduated from high school and works as a housekeeper. When she was growing up, her mother worked full-time in a shoe factory and her father ran a trucking business. Felicia has two younger siblings who live at home with her parents. Felicia lives with her on and off boyfriend, who is also the father of her children. Although they were engaged for some months, they are now in the process of splitting up.

48. *Brenda*, age 18, has one daughter and has never been married. She left school in her senior year and completed her GED right away. She works part-time as a chambermaid, and would like to enroll in a training program to become a certified nursing assistant. Her parents divorced when she was growing up, and she lives with her mother, who was a homemaker, and her mother's boyfriend, who worked as a mechanic. Brenda has two

younger siblings. She lives with the father of her child and they are serious but have no immediate plans to marry.

49. *Corrine*, age 42, has three children and has never been married. She is enrolled in GED courses and is involved in starting a small business with several friends. Corrine was raised by foster parents both of whom worked in factories. She shifted homes several times during adolescence and dropped out of high school. Corrine has also worked in factories. She is not dating and has no plans to move from the region.

50. *Sandy*, age 28, has one daughter and has never been married. She is enrolled in GED courses and expects to take her exam this year. Her parents divorced when she was young, and Sandy and her three siblings moved her father worked as a carpenter and her mother was employed assembling shoes in a factory. Sandy has worked in fast food restaurants, but is not currently employed. She has not seen the father of her children this year. She hopes to move to another region in the next few years.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer: _____
Date: _____

Ms. Peggy Walsh
University of New Hampshire
Durham, NH 03824
(603) 862-2500

Work and Family
Interview Guide for Mothers

Introductions

project description

consent form

BACKGROUND AND GROWING UP

How old are you? (Date of birth.)

Where did you grow up?

Who did you live with when you were growing up?

Who?

When?

Where?

Where did your parents grow up?

How many children do they have?

Were they married? How long? Are they married now?

Parent	grow up	age	children	marital history
Mom				
Dad				

How old was your mother when you were born? (Date of birth)

Did she work when you were very young? school age? Teen?

How old were you when she started to work?

What were her jobs?

And then what did she do?

And next...?

(Entire work history...)

Was she working full time or part-time?

Full year or seasonal?

What was her best job when you were growing up?

Does she work now?

What kind of work does she do now?

How far did she go in school?

How old was your father when you were born?

Did your father/stepfather work when you were growing up?

Was he working full time or part-time?

Full year or seasonal?

What kind of work did he mostly do?

And then what did he do?

And next...?

(Entire work history...)

What was his best job when you were growing up?

Does he work now?

What kind of work does he do now?

How far did he go in school?

Did your parents worry about money when you were growing up?

Did they argue about making ends meet?

Did they borrow? From whom? How often?

Was there a lot of pressure from bills in your house?

Were there other worries in your family? Explain.

Arguments?

Troubles?

What was your childhood like?

Was there a time when things seemed especially hard? Tell me about that.

Was there a time when things seemed especially hard? Tell me about that.

Do you have brothers and sisters?

What are their ages?

How often do you see them?

Are they married? Were they ever married?

Do they have children?

Did they finish high school?

Are they working?

Sibling	age	how often see	marital status	children	finish HS	labor force status
1						
2						
3						
4						

Did they all grow up in the same house with you?

Have you ever lived anyplace else? When and where? For how long?

Who lives with you now? (probe for details.)

How long have you lived here?

Do you pay rent, own or live in a relative's place? (How much $)

name	sex	relation to respondent	age	educ	marital status	labor force status

SCHOOL AND YOUTH

How far did you go in school?

Where did you go to school?

What was school like for you?

What kind of student were you? ("Good" Grades, Group, Showing up)

Was there much fighting at school? (Skip?)

Did students and teachers respect each other?

How much did teachers care about students' learning?

Did anyone at school seem to care about your future?

Did you get involved in things (like sports or activities...) at school?

Did you get in trouble at school?

Did you work while you were in school?

Were your parents interested in what you were doing in school?

Were they strict about homework? Going out on school nights?

Were they more or less strict than your friends' parents?

IF DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL

Why did you leave school when you did?
Were you sure that it was the right thing to do?
What did your parents think when you left?
Did anyone try to stop you?
What did your friends think?

How old were you when you started going out to parties?

When you went out, what did you do?

Was there a lot of drinking?

You?

Your friends?

Were there drugs around?

You?

Your friends?

Had you started dating?

Were most people dating?

Did people at school tend to date just one person steadily?

OR did they date around, with a lot of different people?

Did they tend to have sex with just one person steadily?

OR did people have sex with a lot with different people?

What age did most of the girls you knew well start having sex?

What age did most of the boys you knew well start having sex?

Did they use birth control?

Who usually was the one to take responsibility for it?

Did you or your friends/boyfriends ever get in any trouble with the law?

(Probe details - who when, where, why, end result)

When you were younger, what were your plans for how your life would be?

Did you think you'd have children, be married, be working, in school?

What are they now? Why?

Did you think about going to college?

What did your parents think?

Did they help you decide? Tell me about that.

What did your friends think?

Are you in school now?

IF YES

Do you like it?

What kind of program is it?

How did you find out about it?

Is there anyone who encouraged you to go?

How does being in school make you feel about yourself?

How does your family feel about it?

IF NO

Do you have any plans to go back to school?

What would you like to do?

And how does your family feel about that?

MARRIAGE AND CHILDBEARING

What is your marital status now?

Have you ever been married?

How old were you when you got married?

What was marriage like?

How old were you when you divorced?

How many children do you have? Boys? Girls? Ages?

How old were you when you got pregnant with your first child?

Had you ever been pregnant before? (Details)

At the time you got pregnant with your first child, were you working, going to school, staying at home, or what?

Did you plan to have _____ or was it an accident? Tell me what happened.

(Probe for relationship history: stable or volatile?)

Did you consider having an abortion? Adoption?

Having someone else raise your child?

Did you (marry or) consider marrying the father?

Tell me about that relationship.

Was he around much? How did you feel about that?

Who did you tell when you first found out you were pregnant?

How long did you wait to tell people? (How many months...)

Were you older or younger than your sisters when they had their first baby?

Were you older or younger than your girlfriends?

Have you always wanted children?

Would you like to have more?

How do you feel about being a mother?

How has your life changed?

Has it been pretty much as you expected it to be?

What are the good things about having children right now?

What are the problems with having children?

Do you have adults to talk to?

Is there anyone whose opinion you considered when deciding to have your first child?

How did your parents feel about your decision to have a child? (and not to get married?)

Did they help you out at first? How?

Did they make it harder? How?

Has that changed?

What about now?

If you could plan things the way you want it, how old would you have been when you had your first child?

What's the "right" age? (Married or not?)

How old was the father of _____ (your first child) when s/he was born?

Was he working then?

IF YES,

Full time or part-time?

Full year or seasonal?

Any benefits? Health insurance? Vacation?

What kind of work was he doing then?

IF NO,

When did he last work?

What kind of work did he do?

Why did he leave that job?

What does he spend his time doing now?

Is he looking for work?

Does he work now?

What kind of work does he do now?

How far did he go in school?

RELATIONSHIPS, MEN, AND MARRIAGE

Tell me about other people you've dated.

(Probe for type and timing of relationship, work history and leisure, why it ended.)

How old were you when you first had sex with someone?

Thinking back, were you ready for it?

Was that a serious or a casual relationship?

Did anyone tell you about sex when you were young? Who?

How do you think that first time affected your relationships with men?

Are you in a serious relationship with anyone right now?

IF YES

Tell me about it.

What makes it a serious relationship?

How long has it been going on?

Do you have children together?

Have you made plans for the future?

Are you satisfied with this relationship?

IF NO,

Would you like to be in a serious relationship now?

What kind of person do you think you would want to be in a serious relationship with?

Do you know anyone like that?

Would you like to be in a serious relationship someday?

IF YES,

What kinds of things do you want to happen before you look for a serious relationship?

IF NO,

Why is it that you prefer not to have a serious relationship?

What sort of relationship do you prefer?

Have there been other relationships you consider serious?

What made them serious relationships?

What is your idea of a "good" man? What would he be like?

What do you think about marriage? (When is the "right" time?)

When you think about a woman's life, how is it changed by being married?

When you think about a man's life, how is it changed by being married?

What should a wife expect from her husband?

What things should he be responsible for in the marriage?

Can you give an example? (Probe for rights and responsibilities.)

What can a husband expect from his wife?

What things should she be responsible for in the marriage?

Can you give an example? (Probe for rights and responsibilities.)

Should a man and a woman in a relationship should have equal say about decisions about children and money?

Do (Did) you and _____ have equal say ...?

Who do you think should have responsibility for earning money?

The woman or the man? Or should it be equal?

Who do you think should have responsibility for raising the children?

The woman or the man? Or should it be equal?

Who do you think should have responsibility for disciplining the children?

The woman or the man? Or should it be equal?

WORK EXPERIENCES

Have you worked at all since you left school?

What kind of work have you done? (Probe chronologically)

For each one:

How did you get that job?

What did you do there?

How much were you paid?

Why did you leave?

Job	Hours	When?	How got?	Why left?

Are you working right now?

Tell me what your job is like.

(Ask about getting job, hours, pay, schedule, benefits, security, coworkers, work conditions, autonomy, promotions.)

What are the good parts? Bad parts?

Do you know of another job around here you would like to have?

Have you ever looked into getting some training for a job you would really like to have?

Would you move somewhere else if you could get a good job? Why? Why not?

Do you think women should earn the same pay as men?

Do you think the jobs women tend to have are paid as well as the jobs men have?

Do you think women have to work harder than men to get what they want?

Since you became a mother have your views about women changed at all?

RESOURCES

Are you receiving any kind of public assistance right now?

AFDC?

Social Security?

Disability?

Unemployment?

Subsidized housing?

Help with heat?

(For each...) About how much each month?

NOW:

AFDC	Food stamps	Medicaid	WIC	Housing Help	Other
1. yes/no					
2. often					

Did your family receive any of these when you were growing up?

For how long?

Every year?

GROWING UP:

AFDC	Food stamps	Medicaid	WIC	Housing Help	Other
1. yes/no					
2. often					

When your first child was born, were you part of your mother's or someone else's welfare grant?

What are the custody arrangements for your children?

Does the father of your child/man in your life help with the children on a regular basis?

Time?

Money?

OR Why not?

Does your mother or family (dad, sisters) help with the children on a regular basis?

Time?

Money?

OR Why not?

Do any other relatives, friends, or neighbors help with the children on a regular basis?

Time? Money?

OR Why not?

Who helps	Type of help	How often
1.		
2.		
3.		

FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY NETWORKS

Who do you think of as your closest friends? Are they like you?

Did any of these people affect your decisions about having children, marriage or work?

Who do you turn to when things are going really badly?

How does he or she help you?

When was the last time you had to ask someone for help of any kind?

What kind of help?

Who did you ask?

What about the time before that? (Probe for day to day vs. major help)

Are there people who rely on you too?

When you compare your life to your mother's, what are the main differences you see?

Do you think she had it easier or harder than you?

In what ways?

Is this a good community for you to raise children?

Has it changed since you were young?

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND AND FUTURE

How much income did everyone living in your household last year have all together?

Do you own any property?

What?

How much is it worth?

Do your parents own any property?

What?

How much is it worth?

Are there any family assets that you might inherit or that might benefit you down the road?

How much income did the father of your (oldest) child have last year?

Does he own property?

What?

How much is it worth?

What country (or part of the world) did your parents, grandparents, ancestors come from?

Fathers' family? _____

Mothers' family? _____

Were you raised in a particular religion?

Which one?

Are you religious?

Have you always been?

Are you raising your child _____ (religion) today?

Do you know of child care programs at church, etc.? (Probe involvement)

What do you hope or want for your child?

How far do you want your child(ren) to go in school?

How far do you think s/he'll go?

Do you think your child will have a better life than you?

In what ways?

What is the most important thing about bringing children up?

What would you say are the most important things that help people get ahead in life?

(Probes: education, family, money, hard work, etc.)

Do you feel that you have control over things that happen to you?

What do you fear the most?

For yourself?

Your family?

When you think ahead to the future, how do you feel?

How often do you feel tired or fatigued -- mentally, emotionally, physically?

Do you have any regrets -- things you would change or do differently?

What do you think your life will be like five years from now?

Do you think you'll still be with _____ (current boyfriend) then?

Do you think you'll be married?

More children?

Why or why not?

When you feel really good about yourself, what has happened?

* EXPLAIN NETWORK CIRCLES NOW AND FILL OUT SHEET.

Is there anything you would like to add?

Anything you haven't said you would like to say?

Any questions you would like to ask me?

Optional: May I contact you again?

Name	
Address	
Phone	
Comments	

CONSENT FORM

Work and Family in Rural Areas

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the relationship between changing work opportunities for men and women and how families make decisions.

Description: You are being asked to participate by answering questions about yourself and your family, as well as your views about your community. This interview is confidential. We would like to tape record this interview, but any information that could identify you will be changed or deleted. When we have used the information we will destroy or erase the tape.

_____ _____

Interviewer Date

****

I understand that the procedures for protecting human subjects in this research have been reviewed and approved by the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research. I understand the risks and benefits to me. I understand that data and records associated with my participation are to be kept confidential and the identity of informants will be protected. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may discontinue my participation at any point.

I certify that I have read, or someone has read to me, this agreement, and I fully understand the purpose of the research project and the risks and benefits of my involvement.

I, _____, agree to participate.

_____ _____

Signature Date